

GOP Candidate Ben Carson Threatens to Leave Party

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Presidential candidate Ben Carson threatened Friday to leave the Republican Party in what would be a nightmare scenario for the party trying to recapture the White House in 2016. Carson, a retired neurosurgeon who strongly appeals to many Christian conservatives, surprised the political world with his emergence as a top contender for the Republican



Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson speaks in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Carson threatened Friday to leave the Republican Party in what would be a nightmare scenario for the party trying to recapture the White House in 2016.

(AP Photo/Scott Morgan)

presidential nomination. He has slipped in recent polls behind front-runner Donald Trump, but an independent bid that siphoned even a few percentage points away from the par-

ty's nominee could make it all but impossible for the Republican candidate to win the general election in November. Carson and Trump have upended the Republican race with un-

orthodox campaigns that have tapped into voter frustration with establishment politicians — a contrast with the Democratic side that has largely coalesced behind the can-

didacy of Hillary Rodham Clinton. A third-party run by Carson or Trump would be a worst-case scenario for the Republicans.

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Rift emerges between rich nations, others at climate talks

KARL RITTER
ANGELA CHARLTON
Associated Press

LE BOURGET, France (AP) —

With only hours left to produce a global climate accord, rifts emerged Friday between Western countries and China and its allies over who should bear the most burden in reducing emissions and helping vulnerable nations cope with the rising seas and extreme weather that comes with global warming.

The issue has dogged climate negotiations for years and diplomats at the talks now underway outside Paris are hoping it won't threaten a long-awaited deal. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and other top officials shuttled among high-stakes meetings all day Friday in hopes of coming to a final agreement on Saturday.

But China's deputy chief negotiator stood firm Friday on his nation's demand that rich countries should assume most responsibility for the costs and argued against an agreement that sets too-tough goals for weaning the world off using oil, gas and coal.

The talks, originally scheduled to end Friday, dragged into an extra day as the French hosts said they needed more time to overcome disputes.

Negotiators from more

than 190 countries are aiming to create something that's never been done before: an agreement for all countries to reduce

core of our concern for the Paris agreement." He said he wants different rules for different countries "clearly stipulated" in the global

joined a coalition of Western countries and some developing ones pushing for a "high-ambition" accord. Liu dismissed the

"hopeful" for an accord and has been working behind the scenes to reach compromises.

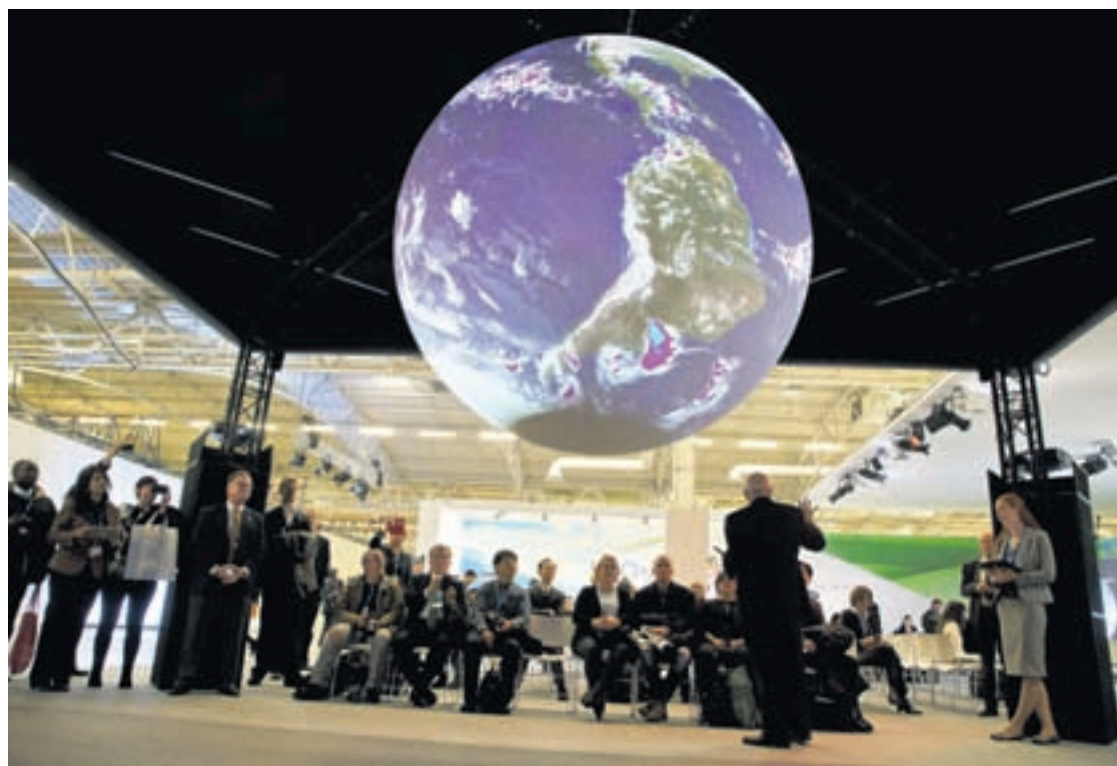
The two weeks of talks are the culmination of years of U.N.-led efforts to create a long-term climate deal. U.N. climate conferences often run past their deadlines, given the complexity and sensitivity of each word in an international agreement and the consequences for national economies.

Analysts said the delay until Saturday was not necessarily a bad sign.

"This needs consensus," said Michael Jacobs, an economist with the New Climate Economy project, speaking to reporters outside Paris. "There's a lot of negotiating to do."

Sam Barratt of advocacy group Avaaz, added: "We would rather they take their time and were patient with the right deal than rush it and get a breakdown. ... Getting 200 countries to agree on anything is tough. Getting them to agree on the future of the planet and a deal on climate change is probably one of the toughest pieces of negotiation they'll ever get involved in."

This accord is the first time all countries are expected to pitch in — the previous emissions treaty, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, only included rich countries. □



Participants attend a panel entitled 'Science on a Sphere Presentation' at the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Le Bourget, north of Paris. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

man-made carbon emissions and cooperate in adapting to rising seas and fiercer weather caused by human activity. The U.S. and European countries want to move away from so-called "differentiation" among economies and want big emerging countries like China and India to pitch in more in a final climate deal.

But Liu Zhenmin, deputy chief of the Chinese delegation, told reporters Friday that issue is "at the

warming pact, and insisted the demand is "quite legitimate."

Liu also argued against sharply limiting the number of degrees the planet warms this century, because that would involve huge lifestyle and economic changes.

"We need heating. We need air conditioning. You need to drive your car," he said.

Divisions surfaced Friday among big developing countries, too, as Brazil

high-ambition coalition as a "performance."

Ban Ki-moon said Friday that negotiators are still in disagreement over how far-reaching the accord should be and who should pay for damages wrought by global warming. Ban said he's "convinced and confident" that negotiators will reach an "ambitious, strong accord."

Kerry, on his fifth straight day in France trying to iron out differences with developing countries, said he's

Kerry to meet with Putin on Syria, Ukraine next week

MATTHEW LEE
AP Diplomatic Writer

LE BOURGET, France (AP) —

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will travel to Moscow next week for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on two of the most vexing crises in U.S.-Russian relations: Syria's civil war and Ukraine's ongoing instability. Kerry will travel to Moscow after attending a high-level meeting with European and Arab foreign ministers on Dec. 14 in Paris, the State Department said on Friday. Kerry will see Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov the next day in the Russian capital.

The discussions come amid severely strained ties between the Cold War foes, but there are also some signs of possible improvement. Washington and Moscow continue to clash over their uncoordinated military efforts in Syria, where the U.S. says it is leading a broad coalition against the Islamic State group. Russia says its airstrikes since late September have targeted the same foe, but Western governments claim mostly moderate rebels are being hit and that Moscow is primarily concerned with shoring up Syrian President

Bashar Assad's control of the country. The U.S. and its allies say Assad needs to leave power at some point for Syria's deadly violence to end. Despite their disagreements, Kerry and Lavrov have been working together to start peace talks between Assad's government and Syrian opposition representatives, hopefully by next month. The State Department said talks in Moscow will cover "ongoing efforts to achieve a political transition in Syria and related efforts to degrade and destroy" the Islamic State militants. Kerry said earlier

this week that he wanted to visit Moscow soon because Russia was "playing a constructive and important role" in trying to find a diplomatic process to halt the Syrian conflict. It would be "irresponsible" not to test a political solution, he said, and that requires Russia because of its influence in the Arab country.

Kerry is hoping the U.N. will endorse his plan for Syria negotiations on Dec. 18, and needs Russian support for that step.

Earlier Friday, Kerry said he was pleased with progress Syrian opposition groups have made to form a unit-

ed front to negotiate with Assad. But the deal that rival factions reached in Saudi Arabia on Thursday still has "kinks" that need to be worked out to make negotiations possible, he said. These include the commitment of a key Saudi-backed militant group, which pulled out of the Saudi meeting at one point in protest. The group, Ahrar al-Sham, claimed too much weight was being given to factions close to the Syrian government. U.S. officials stressed that representatives of the ultraconservative group approved the document nevertheless. □

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Protesters disrupt Donald Trump speech at NYC luncheon



Police officers with the Counter Terrorism unit stand guard as activists protest against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump outside The Plaza Hotel, where Trump is attending the Pennsylvania Republican party's annual Commonwealth Club luncheon, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015, in New York.

(AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

JAKE PEARSON
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — About a dozen protesters disrupted

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's speech at a \$1,000-a-plate New York City luncheon

Friday, criticizing the billionaire businessman's recent anti-Islam rhetoric as security staff forcibly

ejected some of them from the event.

Four protesters chanting "Trump is trying to bring us down, targeting people black and brown," tried to storm a side entrance into the speech at Manhattan's The Plaza Hotel as security staff pushed them away.

The protesters were affiliated with various Arab-American and Muslim-American groups, as well as groups for racial equality. Trump, who is leading most polls in the Republican presidential nomination race, caused a worldwide uproar with his recent call to ban Muslims from entering the United States. One of the protesters, Jorge Gonzalez, fell down a flight of stairs after a hotel security worker pushed him. He said he was uninjured. Another was thrown to the ground in the hotel lobby and two reporters from The

Associated Press were also forcibly removed from the hotel lobby.

Later in Trump's speech, about nine other protesters from various advocacy groups stood up to denounce his recent comments to temporarily bar Muslims from entering the U.S., protesters said.

"I'm really frightened by that kind of rhetoric," said Martha Acklesberg, 69, a member of the group Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, who along with Judith Plaskow, 68, paid to hear Trump speech and then disrupted it in protest. Trump, said Acklesberg, briefly stopped his speech during their protests and quipped, "when you're the front runner you get a lot of attention."

The event, sponsored by the Commonwealth Club, a Pennsylvania Republican group, was closed to the press. □

GOP candidate Ben Carson threatens to leave party

Continued from front

Carson lashed out at Republican leaders who discussed the possibility of a "brokered convention" to choose a nominee if no consensus candidate emerges by the time the party holds its national convention in mid-July. The first state-by-state primary contests begin in less than two months.

The Washington Post first reported Thursday that during a recent private dinner, a group including Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus

and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell addressed Trump's sustained strength and the possibility that a consensus nominee might not emerge before convention.

"If this was the beginning of a plan to subvert the will of the voters and replace it with the will of the political elite, I assure you Donald Trump will not be the only one leaving the party," Carson said in a statement that referenced Trump's repeated threats to leave the party if treated "unfairly." "I pray that the report in the Post this morning was incor-

rect," Carson added. "If it is correct, every voter who is standing for change must know they are being betrayed. I won't stand for it." Republican National Committee spokesman Sean Spicer responded, "His prayers have been answered," adding that it's ultimately the voters who will decide on the Republican nominee.

Spokesman Doug Watts said Carson was appalled at reports suggesting that Republican leaders were trying to manipulate the party's presidential nominating process. He ac-

knowledgeed that Carson, like Trump and the rest of Republican field, signed a pledge not to launch a third-party bid.

"The pledge isn't meaningless," Watts said. "But he signed the pledge based on everybody playing by the rules."

At least one attendee at the private dinner, which is a regular gathering of leading Republicans in Washington, told The Associated Press that suggestions of manipulation by party leaders were dramatically exaggerated. There was brief discussion of the legis-

tical challenges of running a national convention without a presumptive nominee, the attendee said.

Past practice gives one presidential candidate control of convention planning when he or she emerges as the party's nominee earlier in the year. Party officials agreed during the private dinner to review contingency plans should multiple candidates remain viable leading into the July convention, according to the same attendee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to discuss a private meeting. □



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Clinton vows to defeat Islamic State if elected president



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks about recent comments from Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump during a campaign stop in Salem, N.H.

(AP Photo/Jim Cole)

J. JUOZAPAVICIUS

Associated Press

TULSA, Oklahoma (AP) —

Hillary Clinton said Friday her opponents are all talk when it comes to defeat-

ing the Islamic State group but that she's the only presidential candidate with a specific plan.

Speaking in Republican territory, the Democratic

presidential candidate and former Secretary of State sought to emphasize her foreign policy credentials in the aftermath of a major terrorist attack

in Paris and a massacre in California currently under investigation by the FBI as an act of terrorism.

"The others, they talk a lot, they throw out all of these approaches," Clinton said at a rally in Oklahoma. "But I've been in the situation room in the White House and I know what it's going to take and I will keep America safe."

Republican candidates have assailed President Barack Obama as being weak on responding to the rise of the Islamic State and are seeking to link the White House to Clinton's record on foreign policy. Clinton has sought to offer an extensive plan to dis-

mantle the terrorist group from the air, ground and online, and plans to outline her strategy for homeland security next week.

Clinton reiterated she would not send American ground troops to the region if elected president, saying it was "not smart" and is what terrorists would want to happen.

Clinton was campaigning in Oklahoma, a safe Republican state in general elections, and among several "Super Tuesday" states holding Democratic primary contests on March 1. The former first lady is the overwhelming front-runner against two rivals for the Democratic nomination. □

House backs new bill to exclude climate change from trade deals

MATTHEW DALY

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

As negotiators in Paris worked to finalize a global agreement on climate change, the Republican-controlled House on Friday approved a bill that would block trade deals from being used to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The bill was approved on a 256-168 vote. Twenty-four Democrats joined with 232 Republicans to support the bill. Opponents, mostly Democrats, said the bill sends the wrong message as U.S. diplomats meet in Paris with more than 190 nations to finalize an agreement to reduce man-made carbon emissions and adapt to rising seas and increasingly extreme weather.

Rep. Sander Levin, a Democrat, said the climate provision was inserted by Republicans who oppose action on climate change. Many Republicans in Congress question whether human activities are contributing to global warming.

"The Republican Party of the United States may be the only political party

anywhere in denial about climate change," Levin said. "That denial is why this provision ... on climate is before us."

Supporters said the wide-ranging bill would beef up enforcement of U.S. trade agreements and help prevent counterfeit goods from entering the country. The bill also would make permanent a moratorium that prevents states from taxing access to the Internet. Rep. Kevin Brady, the Republican chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, said the bill "will level the playing field for Americans and also make it easier for them to compete in a global marketplace."

The provision on climate change ensures greater oversight of executive-branch negotiators who work on international trade agreements, Brady said.

"Trade agreements should not include provisions on immigration or greenhouse gas emissions," he said, noting that there are other ways for officials to address immigration and global climate change. □

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Family of teen shot by Chicago cop joins calls for change

DON BABWIN

Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The family of a black teenager shot 16 times by a white Chicago police officer on Friday joined the call for change in local leadership and policing in the city and nationwide, weeks after a video of the 2014 killing set off days of protests.

Laquan McDonald was shot in October 2014 by police Officer Jason Van Dyke, who is charged with first-degree murder. Squad-car footage was released late last month upon a judge's order, and there have been protests almost daily since. Protesters allege a cover-up and have called for the resignation of Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez. The Rev. Marvin Hunter, who is McDonald's great uncle, said a news conference Friday that "what we're feeling in Chicago is the real feeling of America itself, and that's injustice against people of color." He also said there are "thousands of Laquan McDonalds."

The family has stayed



Rev. Marvin Hunter, the great uncle of Laquan McDonald, center, accompanied by other family members and supporters, speaks at a news conference Friday, Dec. 11, 2015, in Chicago.

(AP Photo/Teresa Crawford)

largely out of the spotlight since the video was released Nov. 24, but about a dozen of them stood behind Hunter on Friday. A few activists with them wore T-shirts that read "Rahm Failed Us."

One notable absence was McDonald's mother, whom Hunter said is "hurting and traumatized by the constant reminder of the senseless death of her

son."

Since the video's release, McDonald's death became another example in the current debate over gun violence and treatment of African-Americans by the police. Protesters have turned the shooting into a rallying cry, their chants of "16 shots and a cover-up" becoming as familiar as "I can't breathe" became after the video

that showed Eric Garner being taken down by a New York police officer in a fatal chokehold.

The city agreed to a \$5 million settlement with McDonald's family earlier this year without a lawsuit being filed. Hunter downplayed that Friday, saying the money that really matters should come in the form of government resources to foster economic

development and keep such deaths from happening.

Chicago officials fought the release of the video, arguing it could interfere with any resulting court case. Acting on a judge's order, the city released it just hours after Alvarez announced charges against the officer.

An attorney for McDonald's family said they, too, did not want the video made public initially because they were still grieving.

Alvarez has defended the delay in pressing charges against Van Dyke, calling it a complex investigation. Emanuel apologized this week that the incident occurred under his administration. He fired the police chief and named a new head of the police review agency that investigates police conduct. But protests have continued. Earlier this week, U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced the Department of Justice would investigate whether the Chicago Police Department's practices violate federal and constitutional law. □

Homeland Security takes lead in search for Afghan trainees

JEFF MARTIN

Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The Department of Homeland Security has taken a lead role in the search for two Afghan men who disappeared while training with the U.S. military at a base in south Georgia, Air Force officials said Friday.

Air Force officials have said that the men were screened before entering the U.S. and that there's no evidence they pose a threat. Homeland Security is coordinating with

the U.S. State Department in efforts to locate them, Air Force Lt. Col. Chris Karns said.

The men didn't report Monday to maintenance training with the 81st Fighter Squadron, according to officials at Moody Air Force base.

The two had been at Moody since February as part of training aimed at improving the Afghanistan air force. The military hasn't released their names as part of a policy aimed at protecting them,

Karns said.

"Various terrorist organizations or groups or nefarious groups in their country would seek to inflict harm on them," he said. "They're in the U.S. because it's a safer environment to conduct training and by providing their name and image it potentially introduces unnecessary risk to them and their families."

The goal of the program is to train a total of 30 Afghan pilots and 90 Afghan maintenance personnel during a four-year period,

Moody Air Force Base said in an August 2014 statement when the program was announced.

Few details of the search have been released, but authorities visited Valdosta Regional Airport after the men turned up missing and downloaded video from its surveillance cameras, airport manager Jim Galloway said. The airport is about 15 miles (25 kilometers) southwest of the base.

"What they were interested in was outside the

building, but I don't know the details," Galloway said Friday.

It's not the first time foreign servicemen have left training programs at U.S. bases. On September 20, 2014, three Afghan army officers disappeared from a Massachusetts military base while participating in a training exercise. Two days later, they were detained by Canadian border guards as they tried to enter Canada on the Rainbow Bridge in Niagara Falls, Ontario. □

Cause of death sought for body thought to be Cutler's in-law

BRADY McCOMBS

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A medical examiner will perform toxicology and other tests to determine what killed the person believed to be NFL quarterback Jay Cutler's brother-in-law, who was found dead in a steep and rocky area in an isolated part of southern Utah.

Authorities discovered

the body Thursday, nearly two weeks after a rancher found Michael Cavallari's car abandoned near the area. Cavallari, 30, is reality TV personality Kristin Cavallari's brother.

The Utah medical examiner is working to confirm the identity and determine the cause of death, a process that could take as long as two months, Grand County Sheriff Steven White said.

The remains were near the bottom of a steep hillside filled with boulders, about 3 miles northwest of where Michael Cavallari's car was discovered the morning of Nov. 27.

There were no bullet holes, stab wounds or other signs of foul play. It's now up to the medical examiner to determine how he died, with toxicology reports certain to play a factor, White

said.

Medical examiner officials were not immediately available for comment Friday.

Frigid weather in the area might have been a factor, White said. Nighttime temperatures were at or below freezing around the time the car was found against a small embankment.

"I don't know what his mental state might have

been, with possible hypothermia," White said.

Kristin Cavallari said she was heartbroken in an Instagram post Thursday. She posted a picture herself and her brother as children and wrote that "Mikey" had a good heart and always made her laugh.

"I'm at a loss for words, but I know u are in a better place and finally at peace," she wrote. □

US launches trial of facial, eye scans on Mexican border



Contractor Sabira Dewji, right, helps a pedestrian crossing from Mexico into the United States at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry have his facial features and eyes scanned at a biometric kiosk Thursday, Dec. 10, 2015, in San Diego. (AP Photo/Denis Poroy)

ELLIOT SPAGAT

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The federal government this week began collecting facial and eye scans of foreigners entering the U.S. at a busy border crossing with Mexico, a first step in one of its most ambitious efforts

to track people who stay in the country illegally after their visas expire.

Up to half of the people in the U.S. illegally are believed to have overstayed their visas, but the absence of a checkout system has left authorities with no way to identify them.

In a push to change that, Customs and Border Protection began scanning foreigners entering on foot at San Diego's Otay Mesa port of entry. In February, it will start collecting the same information on foreigners walking into Mexico through the check-

point. The trial run, which lasts through June, will help determine if authorities expand screening to foreigners at all land crossings on the 1,954-mile border with Mexico. Authorities will look at the accuracy of the cameras. Congress has long demanded biometric screening such as fingerprints, facial images or eye scans from people leaving the country, but the task poses enormous financial and logistical challenges, especially at land crossings. On Thursday, foreigners put their travel documents on a plate at one of the San Diego crossing's six kiosks and looked into a camera positioned at arms' length. The process took less than a minute. Then, they walked a few steps to a border inspector for questioning.

"It's very fast, not inconvenient in the least," said Rosendo Hernandez of Tijuana, who was on a trip to buy tools.

The government has not announced details on how faces and eyes will

be scanned when foreigners leave the country, but an official said most won't have to stop walking. Scanners will read chip-enabled travel documents at a distance and match the information to entry records.

"It's basically to verify that the same person that came to the United States is the same person that's exiting the United States," said Joe Misenhelter, assistant director at Otay Mesa, the nation's fourth-busiest port of entry last year.

Starting in February, U.S. citizens heading to Mexico on foot will use a separate lane at the California crossing with scanners that collect biographic information, including name and birth date, but not biometrics, Misenhelter said. They won't have to stop if their travel documents are chip-enabled. Marc Rosenblum, deputy director for U.S. immigration policy at the Migration Policy Institute, said the effort aims to fix "the biggest deficiency in the whole system." □

Report cites 241 near collisions between pilots, drones

JOAN LOWY

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There has yet to be a confirmed U.S. collision between a drone and a manned aircraft, but there's a growing number of close calls as drones fly where they least belong — near airports.

A report released Friday counted at least 241 reports of close encounters between drones and

manned aircraft that meet the Federal Aviation Administration's definition of a near-collision, including 28 incidents in which pilots had to veer out of the way. The analysis by Bard College's Center for the Study of the Drone found that 90 of the close drone encounters involved commercial jets. The FAA defines a near-collision as two aircraft flying within 500 feet of each other. In 51 of the in-

cidents studied, the drone-to-aircraft clearance was 50 feet (15 meters) or less, the report said. Most of the sightings occurred within 5 miles (8 kilometers) of an airport and at altitudes higher than 400 feet (120 meters). Those are spaces in which the FAA prohibits drones from flying, raising questions about the effectiveness of the rules.

The report is based on an analysis of government

records detailing 921 incidents involving drones and manned aircraft between Dec. 17, 2013, and Sept. 12, 2015. Researchers cautioned that it's hard for pilots to judge their distance from another object when flying at high speeds.

The majority of the incidents, 64 percent, were sightings of drones in the vicinity of other aircraft with no immediate threat of collision. The FAA has previ-

ously released data on reports of drone sightings, but the Bard report is the first comprehensive analysis of the sightings by researchers outside the aviation community. Its findings are likely to fuel more debate over how much of a threat drones are to manned aircraft as the government struggles with how to reap the benefits of unmanned aircraft without undermining safety. □



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US Financial Front:

Lone profitable ACA insurance co-op now losing millions

TOM MURPHY
AP Business Writer

The lone health insurance cooperative to make money last year on the Affordable Care Act's public insurance exchanges is now losing millions and suspending individual enrollment for 2016.

Maine's Community Health Options lost more than \$17 million in the first nine months of this year, after making \$10.9 million in the same period last year. A spokesman said higher-than-expected medical costs have hurt the cooperative. The announcement casts further doubt on the future of the cooperatives, small non-profit insurers devised during the ACA's creation to inject competition in insurance markets. These co-ops immediately struggled to build their businesses. A dozen of the 23 created have already folded.

An Associated Press review of financial statements from 10 of the 11 surviving co-ops shows that they lost, on average, more than \$21 million in the first nine months of this year. Those losses range from \$3.9 million reported by Maryland's Evergreen Health Cooperative to \$50.7 million booked by Land of Lincoln Mutual Health Insurance Co. in Illinois.

"Clearly the remaining health care co-ops are in dire circumstances," said Robert Laszewski, a health care consultant and former insurance executive who has been a frequent critic of the Affordable Care Act. "I don't know how any of them can survive another year."

The state-based co-ops were seen as a fallback op-

tion by liberals who initially wanted a government-run insurer to compete with for-profit companies that control the U.S. commercial coverage market.

The cooperatives, like other health insurers, have been hit by soaring medical and prescription drug costs. Plus they've had to spend money building a network of care providers, negotiating rates with them and then marketing their plans to customers. They have also received considerably less financial support than they expected from a federal government program designed to support insurers as the exchanges got under way. "It is probably impossible for a start-up in the health insurance space to make any significant money in the first couple years," said Standard & Poor's analyst Deep Banerjee. Established players also have struggled to sell coverage on the ACA's state-based health insurance exchanges, which are a key element behind the law's push to cover millions of uninsured people. UnitedHealth Group Inc. recently reported deep losses from its exchange business and said it would decide next year whether to even remain in the exchanges in 2017. But other insurers like the Blue Cross-Blue Shield carrier Anthem Inc. and Medicaid coverage provider Molina Healthcare Inc. have said they are making money off their exchange business.

Maine's Community Health Options booked about \$217 million in medical costs through the first nine months of this year, as its enrollment approached 71,000 people. Its costs so



This photo shows The UnitedHealth Group Inc.'s campus in Minnetonka, Minn. UnitedHealth Group Inc. recently reported deep losses from its exchange business and said it would decide next year whether to even remain in the exchanges in 2017. (AP Photo/Jim Mone)

far this year are 72 percent higher than what the insurer recorded all of last year.

Spokesman Michael Gendreau said the company decided to freeze individ-

ual enrollment for 2016 in order to ensure "that we are able to provide the same level of care and service that we provided last year." He said the cooperative was not in danger of closing.

Community Health Options is spending 89 percent of the premiums it collects on medical costs and claims. Laszewski, the health care consultant, said small co-ops probably don't want to spend more than 85 percent of their premiums on claims. Aside from paying claims, insurers need to collect enough revenue to run their business. □





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Putin: Russia provides air cover to Syrian opposition group



Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, delivers his speech during a meeting with top military officials in Moscow, Russia, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. Putin said the Russian military action helped change the situation in Syria, supporting the Syrian army offensive.

(Alexei Druzhinin, Sputnik/AP)

V. ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has provided air cover to a leading Western-backed opposition group in Syria, President Vladimir Putin said Friday, calling for closer coordination with the U.S.-allied coalition — comments that may reflect Moscow's desire to narrow differences with the West over the Syrian crisis. At the same time, Putin vowed to further modern-

ize Russia's military and said its forces in Syria will "immediately destroy" any target threatening them, a strong warning to Turkey following its downing of a Russian warplane at the Syrian border. Speaking at a meeting with top Defense Ministry officials, Putin said while supporting the Syrian government forces, Russia also has provided air cover, weapons and supplies to some units of the Free Syrian

Army, a Western-backed opposition group fighting Syrian President Bashar Assad's army. Several hours later, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov refuted the president's statement that Russia is sending weapons and supplies to the FSA. Peskov told reporters that Putin meant to say that Russia is sending weapons and supplies to Syrian government forces but also provides air cover to the FSA.

Moscow has been accused by the West of striking moderate rebels to back up Assad instead of its declared goal, the Islamic State group. Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Russian warplanes have flown 4,000 combat sorties in Syria since Moscow launched its air campaign on Sept. 30, destroying 8,000 "terrorist" targets. He added that Russia moved 214,000 metric tons of supplies to support the military action in Syria and helped restore a tank repair factory in the Syrian province of Homs. Without naming Turkey, Putin said the military should respond in full force to any further "provocations." He said the Russian military base in Syria has been beefed up with additional aircraft and air defense weapons. "I order you to act in the toughest way," Putin said. "Any targets threatening the Russian groups of forces or our land infrastructure should be immediately destroyed." At the same time, he said the military should "develop cooperation with all countries, which have a real interest in destroying terrorists," specifically men-

tioning the need to coordinate with the U.S.-led coalition and Israel to ensure flight safety. Speaking on a visit to Rome, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov offered a rare praise for the U.S.-led coalition, saying Moscow is glad to see it has "intensified its activities," targeting oil facilities and trucks in IS-controlled territories. He emphasized the need to shut the Syrian border with Turkey, saying that Turkey's downing of a Russian warplane amounted to a "cover-up of terrorists." The downing of a Russian bomber by a Turkish fighter jet on Nov. 24, the first time a NATO member shot down a Russian plane in more than half a century, has badly strained the relations between Moscow and Ankara. Turkey said it downed the Russian plane after it violated its airspace for 17 seconds despite repeated warnings, while Russia has insisted the plane had remained in Syrian airspace. Putin has denounced the Turkish action as a "treacherous stab in the back" and ordered the deployment of S-400 long-range air defense missile systems to a Russian base in Syria. □

Syria's Assad says he will not negotiate with armed groups

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Syrian President Bashar Assad said in remarks published Friday that his government will not negotiate with armed groups, calling them "terrorists" and saying they will only talk to political opposition. Assad's comments to Spanish news agency EFE were published by Syria's state media Friday, a day after a conference in Saudi

Arabia that sought to form a unified opposition front ahead of proposed talks on ending Syria's nearly five-year conflict. A peace plan agreed to last month by world powers meeting in Vienna set a Jan. 1 deadline for the start of talks between Assad's government and opposition groups. Within six months, the negotiations are to establish a "credible, inclusive and

non-sectarian" transitional government that would set a schedule for drafting a new constitution and holding a free and fair U.N.-supervised election within 18 months. Saudi Arabia has been a key backer of Sunni opposition blocs pushing for Assad's ouster, such as the hard-line Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham groups that were at the two-day talks in the Saudi Arabian

capital of Riyadh. Assad told EFE that Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and some Western countries "want terrorist groups to join the negotiations table." He said they want his government to "negotiate with terrorists and this is a matter that I believe no one will accept." The Syrian leader said "we are ready to start negotiations with the opposition ...

and the opposition for any person in the world does not mean armed" groups. The powerful Ahrar al-Sham group pulled out of the opposition conference in Saudi Arabia on Thursday in protest over the role given to groups it said are close to the Syrian government, signaling continued divisions among rival factions ahead of the proposed peace talks. □

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Geneva police authorize public events despite high security

JAMEY KEATEN

Associated Press GENEVA (AP) — Security officials in Geneva said Friday that public events, including a beloved December costume parade, will go ahead as planned this weekend despite heightened security measures and an ongoing hunt for suspects allegedly linked to the radical Islamic State group.

Swiss officials announced enhanced vigilance a day earlier and said Geneva police were searching for at least four suspects allegedly linked to IS and believed to be plotting a "specific" attack in the city. Authorities have not identified the suspects.

The Geneva department of security said in a statement Friday that "the level of vigilance remains unchanged for now" and that the reinforced police deployments will be maintained. It said the public can stay informed through a mobile phone app.

The greater vigilance has meant the public, private security teams and others have been on a greater lookout for suspicious activities: At Geneva's airport, bomb squads cordoned off and suspended access to some areas to deal with two pieces of abandoned luggage.

Airport spokesman Bertrand Staempfli says no bomb was found and flights were not delayed or disrupted. Authorities located the owner of one bag found abandoned near a security checkpoint, and another bag was destroyed by bomb squads.

Staempfli said bomb alerts typically happen at least once a week at the airport, but authorities received more reports from passers-by and security teams on Friday. Across town, the head of Geneva security met with the top official at the U.N. office in Geneva, one of the city's many diplomatic sites where guards carrying submachine guns



Security officers control the area in front of the French consulate due to a high level of alert, in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. Geneva security officials say public events including a beloved December costume parade will go ahead as planned this weekend, a day after announcing a heightened security alert and a hunt for suspects allegedly linked to the radical Islamic State group. (Salvatore Di Nolfi/Keystone via AP)

have been deployed.

Michele Zaccheo, a U.N. spokesman in Geneva,

said there was "no specific threat" targeting U.N. personnel, and insisted

"We are taking the right kinds of precautionary measures." □

Dutch man jailed for smuggling cocaine, heroin in ambulances

LONDON (AP) — A Dutch man who set up a fake ambulance company to smuggle huge amounts of heroin and cocaine into Britain was sentenced Friday to 24 years in prison. Olof Schoon, 38, pleaded guilty last month to conspiring to smuggle drugs with an estimated value of more than 1 billion pounds (\$1.5 billion).

He and two accomplices were arrested in June at a parking lot in Smethwick, central England. Police found 10 million pounds (\$15 million) worth of cocaine and heroin in secret compartments inside their ambulance.

Detectives say Schoon's International Ambulance Team — a company complete with offices, fake invoices and a fleet of vehicles — had made 44 similar trips from the Netherlands to England in the previous 14 months.

Passing sentence Friday at Birmingham Crown Court, Judge Francis Laird said this was "a highly sophisticated, meticulously planned and well-executed conspiracy involving the importation of Class A drugs on a truly colossal scale."

The accomplices were jailed for 18 and 25 years. □

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Bullet train, nuclear deal top Japan's Abe agenda in India

NIRMALA GEORGE

Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Prime Minister Narendra Modi hopes the visit this weekend by Shinzo Abe will be a major step in transforming India into an economic powerhouse with Japan's help in building bullet trains, "smart cities" and accessing nuclear technology. India and Japan are set to sign a \$15 billion agreement for a high-speed train linking the Indian financial hub of Mumbai with Ahmadabad, the commercial capital of Modi's home state, Gujarat. The train would cut travel time on the 505 kilometer (315 mile) route from eight hours to two.

For Japan, still smarting from losing out to China over a similar agreement in Indonesia, firming up the Indian deal was crucial. Tokyo has promised technical and financial support to New Delhi for the project, including a low-interest 50-year Japanese loan.

The deal would benefit Japanese companies with contracts for manufactur-



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, left, is greeted by Indian minister of state for finance, Jayant Sinha, as he arrives in New Delhi, India, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. Abe is on a three-day visit to India.
(AP Photo/Saurabh Das)

ing rail cars, tracks and operating systems.

Other major priorities during Prime Minister Abe's three-day visit include discussions on a civil nuclear agreement, military purchases for India's armed forces and Japanese aid

to upgrade India's creaking infrastructure.

As India tries to balance its economic growth with sustainable development, New Delhi is keen to increase its use of nuclear power but the two sides are still some distance away from a nuclear deal. Analysts said that Japan, which has long been seen as a pacifist nation and a firm supporter of nuclear nonproliferation, will have strong reservations about

signing a civil nuclear agreement with India, because New Delhi has not signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

"Tokyo will want some kind of commitment from India that it will not conduct a nuclear test. But India will have concerns about its strategic autonomy being curbed if it agrees to conditionalities," said Lalima Varma, professor of Japanese studies at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Univer-

sity.

"While it's unlikely a civil nuclear deal will be signed during this visit, the two sides will air their concerns. That could be construed as progress," she said.

In 1998, when India conducted its nuclear tests, Japan imposed economic sanctions and cut off financial aid to India. The sanctions were lifted in 2001 and relations have since improved significantly.

India has been trying to upgrade its military equipment and a potential defense agreement to sell US-2 amphibious aircraft to India could turn out to be Japan's first major military sale after it lifted a postwar ban on the export of defense equipment in 2014. Japan's navy uses the US-2 aircraft for maritime surveillance and search and rescue operations.

The two countries are also likely to sign an agreement allowing the transfer of defense technology and co-production of arms and military equipment.

Abe and Modi are expected to explore ways to boost their surprisingly low trade. Analysts say despite a 15 percent annual rate of increase in two-way trade, India accounts for only 1.2 percent of Japan's total trade, and Japan for 2 percent of India's. □



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Spanish officer killed in Kabul bomb attack

AMIR SHAH

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) —

A car bomb explosion that was claimed by the Taliban hit a diplomatic area of central Kabul on Friday, killing a Spanish police officer and wounding seven civilians. The area was rocked by at least five more explosions and gunfire overnight as security forces tried to flush out Taliban attackers. Afghan Deputy Interior Minister Mohammad Ayub Salangi said the car bomb struck near a foreign guest-house in Shir Pur, an area with embassies and other diplomatic buildings seen as one of the safer parts of the Afghan capital. Two attackers were killed

but three or four others were hiding in the guest-house, deputy Kabul police chief Gul Agha Rouani said. He said three Spaniards were rescued and there were no other foreigners remaining in the building.

It was not clear if the guest-house belonged to the Spanish Embassy.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said a Spanish police officer was killed, after saying earlier that the attack happened near the Spanish Embassy but did not target it. Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said seven civilians were wounded and confirmed that a foreign security guard was

killed.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the initial massive explosion that shook buildings in the area Friday, with spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid saying it was carried out by a suicide bomber.

The explosion left two houses in flames, said Habibullah, a police official who like many Afghans goes by one name. "It's possible the attackers are hiding. We've blocked all the streets and are searching," he said.

Shir Pur resident Mohammad Zaman said the explosion, which sent a giant cloud of smoke into the sky, was so powerful it broke his glasses. □



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Venezuela promotes judge in divisive Leopoldo Lopez case



Members of the National Assembly vote during a session in Caracas, Venezuela. Venezuela's outgoing congress has promoted a judge who drew international criticism by handing down a long prison term to opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez.

(AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

HANNAH DREIER
Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Venezuela's outgoing congress has promoted a judge who drew international criticism by handing down a long prison term to opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez.

Lawmakers from the ruling socialist party named Judge Susana Barreiros as head public defender days after the opposition won a landslide congressional victory that represented the first major change to the balance of power in more than a decade.

Opposition leaders took the Thursday appointment as an affront and said the appointment showed how little respect the ruling party has for human rights and international opinion.

Outgoing National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello responded gleefully, saying the more the "bourgeois" opposition attacks the judge, the more it solidifies her revolutionary credentials.

In September, Barreiros gave Lopez the maximum possible sentence of 14 years in prison for his role in leading anti-government

street protests that turned bloody in 2014.

The appointment was part of what promises to be a string of actions aimed at consolidating power before the socialists hand over the legislature to the opposition.

Lawmakers also gave workers control of the National Assembly television station in a bid to keep it out of the hands of the opposition. Incoming congressmen have been eagerly planning what to do with the channel, having been frozen out of the state television landscape for years, and mostly ignored even by privately

held stations.

Opposition lawmakers have promised to use the channel to air investigations into topics like corruption.

It's unclear whether the new congress will be able to take it back from the newly created worker collective in January.

Next week, the outgoing congress is expected to name a group of new judges to the Supreme Court, where they will serve out 12-year terms unless the opposition congress manages to impeach them.

Unlike the president, Venezuela's high court has the

power to negate legislation.

Opposition lawmakers have pledged to pass a bill granting amnesty to Lopez and some 70 other activists considered political prisoners as their first order of business.

Hardliners are also promising to launch a campaign to recall unpopular President Nicolas Maduro. That could free Lopez from prison and pave the way for him to run for president.

Maduro in a speech this week reiterated his claim that Lopez is a murderer, and promised to fight any amnesty law. □

Honduras:

Autopsy: soccer player shot 18 times

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP)

— Prosecutors said Friday that an autopsy shows Honduran national soccer team player Arnold Peralta suffered 18 gunshot wounds in what they called a "vicious attack."


Peralta was killed Thursday when he was attacked at a shopping mall in his hometown.

The statement from the chief prosecutors' office says Peralta "was viciously attacked, and he died of

multiple gunshot wounds to the skull, face and chest."

The killing occurred at the parking lot of the Uniplaza mall in La Ceiba, on the country's Caribbean coast. Police said two men on a motorcycle sprayed Peralta with bullets. Another soccer player who was with him at the time was unharmed.

Peralta was on vacation following the conclusion of the Honduran national league season. □




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Many in Haiti expect to sit out presidential runoff election



A demonstrator holds up a banner that reads in Creole "The Vote of the population has to be respected" during a protest by the Haitian rights groups against the country's electoral council in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Campaigning for the Dec. 27 presidential runoff is technically under way, but so far only one candidate appears to be running.

(AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)

DAVID McFADDEN
Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti

(AP) — Protesters have streamed into the capital's streets in recent weeks in sometimes violent rallies to back opposition demands for an independent recount of the first round of Haiti's presidential vote and immediate changes to an electoral council.

That fervor isn't shared by many in this impoverished country, however, and analysts worry widespread voter apathy is threatening the latest attempt to shore up Haiti's fragile democracy. The malaise during this year's three-round electoral cycle is occurring while nearly all public offices are up for grabs.

Food vendor Minouche Jean didn't vote in the first round of the presidential

election in late October and won't cast a ballot in the runoff that is scheduled for Dec. 27. She has no interest in a process that seems to matter so little in her daily life.

"It's a waste of my time to go stand in line for hours and get nothing in return," she said while arranging small bags of rice and sugar on a wooden stand in a Port-au-Prince shantytown. "I have to make money."

Campaigning for the Dec. 27 runoff is technically under way, but so far only one presidential candidate appears to be running. The first round's No. 2 finisher, Jude Celestin, has alleged "massive fraud" in favor of the government-backed contender and his opposition alliance threatens to unravel the vote. The top finisher, Jovenel Moise of

outgoing President Michel Martelly's Tet Kale party, is campaigning and complains critics are not providing evidence to support accusations of vote-rigging.

Jean's dim view of the democratic process appears to be widely held judging by interviews conducted across the country by The Associated Press. That deep sense of voter disenchantment suggests the already low turnout for the October vote will be repeated in the presidential runoff. Only 18 percent turned out for the first legislative round in August.

"If you vote in Haiti, you get betrayed," said Chery Anozier, pausing as he made spicy peanut paste on a hand-cranked grinder along the side of a dusty road. "I cannot put my trust

in these politicians. "

There are many theories for such sentiments: a lack of inspiring candidates; exasperation with broken promises and years of political infighting; suspicions that electoral officials will falsify results or that leaders are chosen by the foreign governments funding the vote.

James Morrell, director of the Washington-based Haiti Democracy Project, said the mood runs from "apathy to resentment to conscious boycott after so many disappointments."

Roughly 1.5 million votes were cast in the presidential contest's first round Oct. 25, or just 26 percent of Haiti's 5.8 million registered voters.

And Haitian observer groups suspect most of those votes were cast by "mandataires," political party workers told to be at polling stations. The groups note the Provisional Electoral Council issued over 900,000 accreditations for political party representatives.

The turnout was roughly similar to the 2010 presidential election, but that vote was held in the wake of a devastating earthquake that killed as many as 300,000 people, made more than a million homeless and left Haitians fixated more on survival than politics. The election in 2006 had 60 percent turnout.

Those who did cast ballots in October and August evoked a sense of civic duty. But even that feeling isn't always enough to get people to voting centers. □

Females at Gitmo still barred from moving prisoners

BEN FOX
Associated Press

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba (AP) —

A military judge refused this week to lift an order barring female guards at Guantanamo from having physical contact with five men charged in the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, at least for now.

Army Col. James Pohl denied a request by prosecutors to lift a temporary order he imposed in January.

Their request followed three days of testimony by Guantanamo Bay detention center officials who said the rule interfered with prison operations and discriminated against women soldiers.

Pohl is expected to take up the matter again following additional testimony at a hearing early next year.

The defendants say being moved from their high-security prison to court on the U.S. base in Cuba by guard escort teams that include women is an affront to their Muslim beliefs.

Their lawyers also argue that it is traumatic for men who were subjected to abusive interrogations while in CIA custody.

The prison commander expressed skepticism that the men are truly concerned about physical contact with female guards, noting that other prisoners have not raised the issue. "I think it's based on an attempt to stall these proceedings, that's what I think it's based on," Army Col. David Heath told the court.

Heath said the men, who are held in a high-security unit known as Camp 7 with nine other suspected terrorists, are treated humanely in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

But he conceded that was not the case before they came to the base in 2006.

"I know that the defendants were physically and mentally mistreated," he said.

David Nevin, a civilian lawyer for lead defendant Khalid Shaikh Mohammad. □

St. Vincent ruling party narrowly wins fourth term

DUGGIE JOSEPH
Associated Press

KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent

(AP) — The governing party in the tiny eastern Caribbean islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines won a narrow victory in parliamentary elections, for a fourth consecutive term in power. The Unity Labor Party led by Ralph Gonsalves took a one-seat majority in the House of Assembly,

according to preliminary results released this week. The party holds eight seats while the opposition New Democratic Party led by economist Arnhim Eustace has seven.

"I thank God for a wonderful victory," Gonsalves tweeted after the results were announced.

His party said completion of St. Vincent's first large international airport will be one

of the major projects it will pursue, promising to have it operational in the next five years. The first planes already landed nearly a month ago at Argyle International Airport to test the facilities, which will handle the roughly 200,000 tourists who come each year.

The party also said it will continue development of a geothermal project to reduce dependence

on oil, and Gonsalves has pledged to reduce poverty, improve security, boost education and tackle climate change issues.

The opposition New Democratic Party, which has criticized government spending, campaigned on a pledge to improve infrastructure, create jobs for young people, build a new hospital and revive the island's agriculture sector. □



Wishing Our Great Friend Alfred Olieszewski a Very Happy Birthday!

ORANJESTAD - Marion and Alfred Olieszewski are loyal visitors to Aruba have become great friends of the island over the years. This lovely couple is from Astoria, New York and Fort Pierce, Florida. They have three daughters, Donna Clerico of Stafford, Connecticut, Karen Olieszewski of Croton, New York, and Debra Corcoran of Syoset, New York. Marion and Alfred are owners at the Renaissance Resort, purchasing timeshare during pre-construction all the way back in 1987 when it was originally called Harbourtown! Alfred will be celebrating



his 80th birthday with his 3 daughters, 6 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren in New York next week on December 14th. Marion and Alfred already had a wonderful early birthday celebration here in Aruba with daughters Donna and Debi and son-in-law Jim. They always have a great time in Aruba – their favorite vacation destination! Alfred and Marion's entire family, their 3 daughters and 2 son-in-laws, 6 grandchildren and their 3 spouses and 4 great grandchildren, Alfred's cousin Sandra and the rest of the family all wish Alfred a very Happy 80th Birthday!





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Fishes & More hosts the Griffiths and the McBary's

PALM BEACH - Fishes & More, one of the great restaurants in the Arawak Garden, hosted two couples this past week: Peter and Linda Griffith and Janet and Jim McBary. The restaurant had been recommended by the parents of one of the couples and it proved to be a golden choice, as the reviews were glowing. Peter, Linda, Janet and Jim had the fish, the pasta, the tuna tartar and the chicken Parme-

giano and they loved every single bite. Fishes & More was happy when the two couples vowed to be back soon: that's the way they like it! The Arawak Garden is a plaza on the hi-rise strip across from the Occidental Resort. Nightly live music, several restaurants, a piano bar and small kiosks for souvenir shopping make an evening at the Garden a special event. □



ECLAC Proposes Debt Relief to Fight Against Climate Change

ORANJESTAD - The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) proposed this week in the framework of the climate conference in Paris a strategy to reduce the external public debt of English-speaking Caribbean countries that are considered to be Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through the creation of a regional resilience fund to finance climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

This proposal was presented today by the Director of the regional organization's Economic Development Division, Daniel Titelman, during an event organized by ECLAC in conjunction with the Commonwealth Secretariat, in the context of the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is taking place from November 30 to December 11 in France. Titelman explained that in

2013, ten countries of the Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) had total public debt percentages of between 76% and 130% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP), above the limits of what is considered to be sustainable debt. Total public debt, both internal and external, in 15

countries of the Caribbean (the ten already mentioned plus Anguilla, Guyana, Montserrat, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago) reached nearly 50 billion dollars, equivalent to 72% of subregional GDP. Of this amount, about 30 billion corresponds to internal debt and nearly 18 billion to external debt, 46% of which is owed to private creditors and 54% to public creditors.

ECLAC underscores that these high debt burdens reflect the economic and environmental vulnerabilities of these countries and have become a hindrance to development of the SIDS (which also include countries that are not islands but that face similar challenges). As an example of this, it is estimated that between 2000 and 2014 natural disasters caused damage of at least 27 billion dollars in

English-speaking Caribbean countries.

The United Nations regional organization proposes the creation of a resilience fund that can be financed through instruments such as Debt Swaps for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, which require interaction between multilateral institutions, donor countries and debtor countries. The sources of financing for this mechanism can come from the global funds for climate change. In exchange, the beneficiary countries would have to commit to allotting the resources that they save on debt servicing to this Caribbean resilience fund, which would be dedicated to financing climate change mitigation and adaptation actions and would be managed by a solid and credible financial institution. □



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Loyal Visitors Honored by ATA at the Marriott Surf Club

PALM BEACH - Recently the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure of honoring a group of loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba at the Marriott Surf Club as Distinguished Visitors. The symbolic honorary title is presented in the name of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to guests who visit Aruba for 10-to-19 consecutive years.

The honorees were Mr. Christopher and Mrs. Sarita Shoulla and their daughters Madison, Marisa and Mackenzie, all from Massachusetts, Mr. Yakov and Mrs. Yelena Vevitsis from New York, and Ms. Jessie Baginski from Ohio.

All of the honorees are loyal guests of the Marriott Surf Club and they love Aruba very much because of the friendly people, the weather, the beaches, the restaurants, the Casinos, and just about everything else! They say Aruba feels



like a second home where the people are like family to them, and the Mar-

riott Surf Club is truly their 'home-away-from-home.' The certificates were pre-

sented by Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority

together with family and friends from the Marriott Surf Club. □

Beautiful Beach Wedding for Karlie and Wes on Aruba!



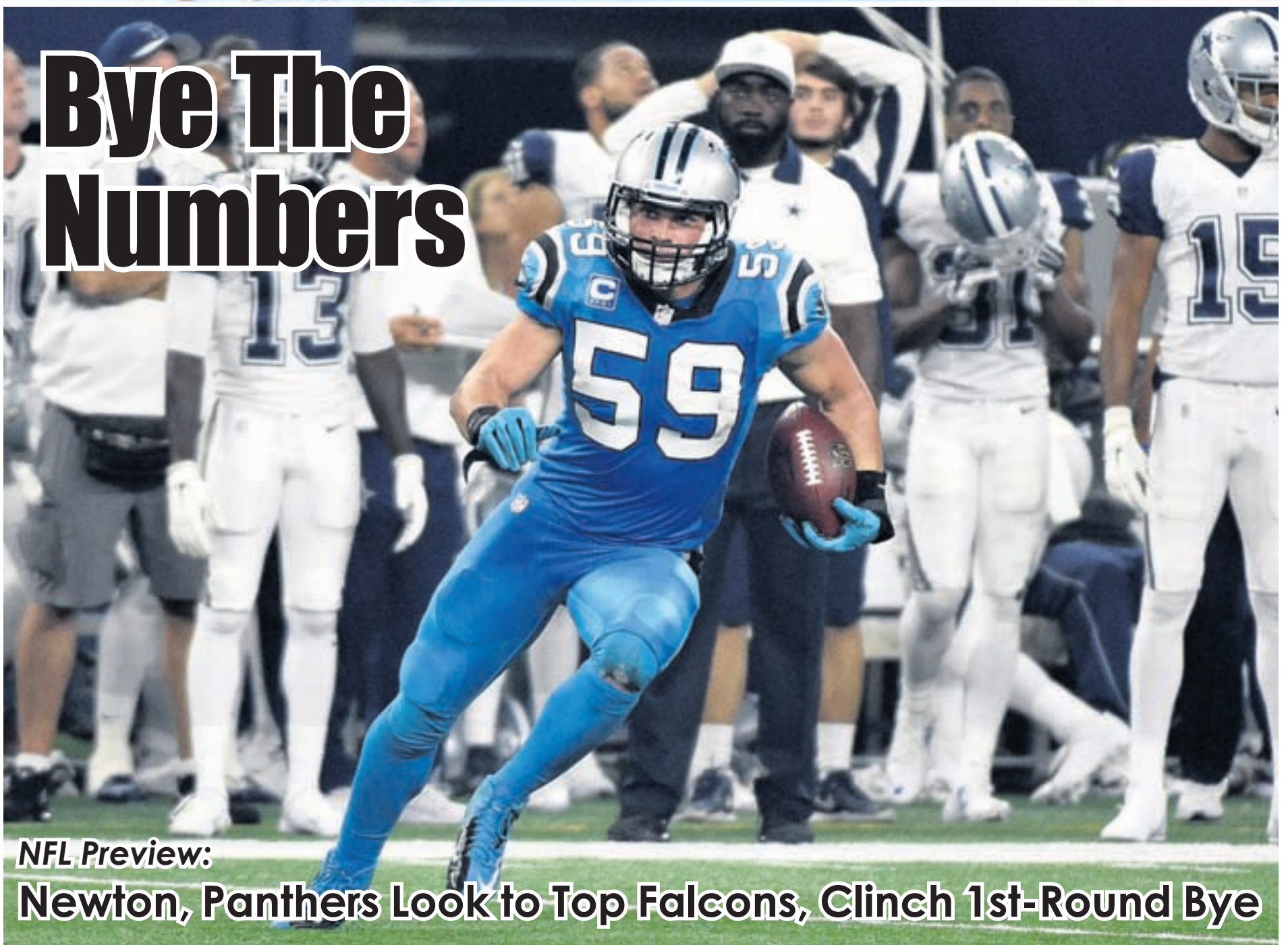
EAGLE BEACH - Karlie and Wes met as student's working for the town of Fort Erie in Ontario, Canada. They had been dating for nine years and got engaged in the summer of 2014. Karlie's family has been coming to Aruba for over 30 years because of the warm weather, friendly people and beautiful beaches. Karlie and Wes knew that Aruba would make the

perfect place to get married after vacationing on the island several times a year. The wedding ceremony, reception and entire week were exactly what they had envisioned. Minister Willie Panopio did the honors of marrying the lovely couple. They couldn't have asked for a more perfect day, and they plan on returning for many years to come. □



Golf: Donaldson Still Leading After Thailand 2nd Round By 2

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NFL Preview:

Newton, Panthers Look to Top Falcons, Clinch 1st-Round Bye

Carolina Panthers middle linebacker Luke Kuechly (59) runs back an interception thrown by Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo for a touchdown as Cowboys on the sideline watch during the first half of an NFL football game, in Arlington, Texas. Clinchings may be at hand in Week 14 of the schedule. Unbeaten Carolina already owns the NFC South title and can secure a first-round playoff bye by beating Atlanta.

(AP Photo/Michael Ainsworth)

NEW YORK (AP) — Cam Newton is building a strong case to be the NFL Most Valuable Player this season. Behind the play of the

multi-dimensional fifth-year quarterback, the unbeaten Carolina Panthers have already wrapped up the NFC South division for a

third straight season. They can secure a first-round bye in the NFC playoffs with a win on Sunday at home against the Atlanta

Falcons. Newton has thrown five touchdown passes in two of his last three games, and has earned NFC offensive

player of the week three times this season.

Continued page 18

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Newton, Panthers Look to Top Falcons, Clinch 1st-Round Bye

Continued from page 17

Despite lacking a true No. 1 wide receiver — Kelvin Benjamin was lost in training camp to a season-ending knee injury — Newton has thrown a career-high 25 touchdown passes. He's also a major factor in Carolina's third-ranked ground attack with 478 yards rushing and seven touchdowns.

Some of Newton's passing numbers — he's 15th in the NFL in passer rating (93.2), 18th in passing yards (2,797) and 29th in completion percentage (58.4) — may cost him an opportunity to beat out New England's Tom Brady or Arizona's Carson Palmer or any other candidates. Regardless, Newton has found a way to win, undefeated in his last 15 starts and 12 this season.



Philadelphia Eagles linebacker Connor Barwin (98) sacks New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady (12) during the first half of an NFL football game, in Foxborough, Mass. The Eagles beat the Patriots, 35-28.

(AP Photo/Steven Senne)

"It feels like he went through another ceiling, and that's what I see so far in the film this year," Atlanta Falcons coach Dan Quinn said. Newton admitted this week he always gets a little more hyped against his hometown Falcons. But he'll face an old nemesis in Quinn, a former defensive coordinator with the Seattle Seahawks. Quinn has found ways to slow down Newton in the past and limit his effectiveness with the read option, often frustrating the quarterback. Also this weekend, the New England Patriots, Denver Broncos, and Arizona Cardinals are on the verge of grabbing division crowns. The Cardinals defeated the Minnesota Vikings 23-

20 on Thursday for their seventh straight victory, and secured a playoff spot. Should Seattle lose at Baltimore on Sunday, the NFC West would belong to the Cardinals. New England goes to the Houston Texans, and both sides need to make statements. For the Patriots, it's a chance to show they won't keep sliding with a myriad of injuries and a dangerous penchant for allowing big plays. Their second straight defeat last week, against Philadelphia, featured three returns for touchdowns by the Eagles. Houston is tied with Indianapolis for the AFC South lead and visits the Colts next week. The Texans'

staunch defense was blistered in Buffalo, and needs a quick turnaround against Tom Brady. Of course, with JJ Watt on their side, that could happen for the Texans, though Watt is playing with a broken left hand. If Denver wins the rest of its games, it stays at home for the AFC playoffs. That won't be easy with matchups against the Pittsburgh Steelers and Cincinnati Bengals coming up. But with a defense that ranks first overall and against the pass, has 41 sacks, and has yielded fewer points (210) than anyone but Cincinnati, the Broncos will be in every game. On Sunday, they welcome the Oakland Raiders, against whom they have won eight straight. Oakland's inexperience has hurt it in the last month, with the Raiders dropping four of five games. Nothing would suit the Bengals more than walking off with the AFC North by sweeping the season series with the Steelers. Indeed, even if Pittsburgh wins this one, its chances of surpassing Cincinnati are not strong. The Steelers have won their last eight games in December and their offense is on fire: 30 points in four straight games for the first time in club history. They could meet their match, though, because the Bengals have allowed the fewest points in the league with 196. □

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Donaldson still leading in Thailand by 2 strokes

CHONBURI, Thailand (AP) — Jamie Donaldson of Wales leads the Thailand Championship into the weekend by two shots over Martin Kaymer after the second round on Friday. Donaldson carded a 4-under-par 68 to lie at 13 under in the Asian Tour event at Amata Spring Country Club. Kaymer, the runner-up last year, sank eight birdies against a single bogey on the 14th hole, for a second round of 65 and two-day total at 11 under. Former champion Sergio

Garcia featured in a three-man group tied for third at 9 under. Donaldson started on the back nine and made four birdies, but ran into trouble on the front nine with three birdies and three bogeys. "You need to keep the momentum going and I managed to do that today," he said. "It was a great temperature at the start of the day but it got really hot on my back nine which is the front nine." Kaymer thought his round was an improvement on

Thursday but merely solid. "There wasn't really any highlight for me," he said. "I just hit good iron shots towards the greens, and gave myself a lot of good chances for birdies. I didn't miss many putts." Garcia also struggled in the heat on his back nine and shot a 69, to tie with Matthew Fitzpatrick of England (67), and Chinnarat Phadungsil of Thailand (69). Defending champion Lee Westwood improved with a 68 after his opening 71, to be eight shots behind Donaldson. □

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Having huge season, Julio Jones struggling to reach end zone

PAUL NEWBERRY
AP Sports Writer
FLOWERY BRANCH, Georgia
(AP) — Julio Jones is having another monster season for the Atlanta Falcons. Strangely, though, he hasn't scored a touchdown in more than a month. Mired in a five-game losing streak, the Falcons are hoping for that disturbing trend to change when they face the unbeaten Carolina Panthers on Sunday. "I was really surprised," coach Dan Quinn says. "He's a huge part of what we do. We're going to try to use him in the very best ways, and keep attacking every shot we get. We expect him to be the focus of all the stuff that we want" to do. Jones shrugged off his four-game scoring drought, saying he doesn't pay attention to individual statistics. Sure, he can't remember the last time he scored a touchdown — it was Nov.

1 against Tampa Bay, on an 8-yard pass in the closing seconds that sent the game to overtime — but that's just the way he's wired. "If you ask me the last catch I had over 10 yards, I really don't know," he says. "I just try to do my job." By every other standard, Jones is having one of the best receiving seasons in the history of the NFL. He leads the league with 102 catches and 1,338 yards, putting him on pace for the second-most receptions (136, which would trail only Marvin's Harrison record of 143 set in 2002) and the third-most yards (1,784, topped only by Calvin Johnson's 1,964 in 2012 and Jerry Rice's 1,848 in 1995). After putting up four touchdowns in Atlanta's first three games, Jones has just two in the last nine contests. Defenses know if they can shut down Jones — or at least limit his opportunities



Tampa Bay Buccaneers cornerback Sterling Moore (26) knocks a pass away from Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Julio Jones (11) in the end zone during the second quarter of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 6, 2015, in Tampa, Fla. Jones is having another monster season for the Atlanta Falcons. Strangely, though, he hasn't scored a touchdown in more than a month.

(AP Photo/Brian Blanco)

to go deep — there aren't too many other Falcons they have to worry about. Certainly not among the wideouts, where Jones has accounted for 56 percent of all receptions. Running back Devonta Freeman is the team's second-leading

receiver with 58, followed by tight end Jacob Tamme at 47. The next actual receiver on the list is Roddy White with a mere 30 catches. The lack of an effective running game, especially in the red zone, has really cut

into Jones' scoring chances. Since Atlanta isn't likely to pound the ball into the end zone, defenses can stack their coverages toward No. 11. The Falcons, at 6-6 in wins and losses, have ruined a 5-0 start, plummeted out of a playoff spot and face the daunting task of trying to turn things around with two games still remaining against the Panthers, including Sunday's contest in Carolina. A few more big plays from Jones would help the cause. "It's definitely something we're trying to do, but it gets harder and harder each week," offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan said. "The tighter you get in the red zone, the more double coverage he sees, the more people are taking him out. But there's really not a play we have that we're not looking toward him first." □

Cardinals top Vikings 23-20 on Freeney's defensive play

BOB BAUM

AP Sports Writer

GLENDAL, Arizona (AP) —

Dwight Freeney stripped the ball from Teddy Bridgewater with 5 seconds remaining to deprive the Vikings a chance at the game-leveling field goal, as the Arizona Cardinals clinched a playoff berth with a 23-20 victory over Minnesota.

"That's why I came back, because moments like this, you can't duplicate those in life," said Freeney, who joined the Cardinals a month into the season.

Bridgewater moved the Vikings to the Arizona 31-yard line, well within the range of Blair Walsh. But Freeney hit the quarterback's arm as Bridgewater tried to pass. The ball came loose and Calais Campbell recovered.

"To be able to have this type of dream situation, fourth quarter, game on the line, it's kind of like ninth



Arizona Cardinals inside linebacker Dwight Freeney (54) forces Minnesota Vikings quarterback Teddy Bridgewater (5) to fumble during the second half of an NFL football game, Thursday, Dec. 10, 2015, in Glendale, Ariz. The Cardinals recovered the ball to secure the 23-20 win.

(AP Photo/Rick Scuteri)

inning, two outs," Freeney said, "one of situations for a defensive lineman, and I was able to make a play." Chandler Catanzaro's 47-yard field goal with 1:23 to go was the winning score as Arizona (11-2) won its seventh in a row.

Bridgewater passed for 335 yards and a touchdown for the Vikings (8-5), who were playing without four defensive starters but made it close after being embarrassed at home by Seattle 38-7 on Sunday.

Carson Palmer threw for 310 yards and two touchdowns for the Cardinals, who will win the NFC West if Seattle is beaten Sunday at Baltimore.

Minnesota's Adrian Peterson wanted more carries than the eight he got (for 9 yards) against the Seahawks. He got them, carrying 23 times for 69 yards, but had only 31 yards on 19 attempts after his 9-yard touchdown run on the Vi-

kings' first possession of the night.

Palmer connected on scoring plays of 65 yards to John Brown and 42 to Michael Floyd. His 30th and 31st touchdowns broke the franchise record of 30 set by Kurt Warner in Arizona's 2008 Super Bowl season. Floyd caught five passes for 102 yards. David Johnson, the rookie who stepped in when the Cardinals' top two backs were hurt, rushed for 92 yards in 19 attempts.

After Walsh's 54-yard field goal cut the Arizona lead to 20-13 and the Cardinals failed to convert on third-and-1, the Vikings went 88 yards in 11 plays, tying it 20-20 on Bridgewater's third-down, 7-yard touchdown pass to Mike Wallace with 4:50 remaining.

Arizona moved downfield and left guard Mike Iupati caught a deflected pass for 11 yards in the drive to the decisive field goal.

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Avoiding Germany the hope for most in Euro 2016 draw

JEROME PUGMIRE

AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — With more countries competing at the 2016 European Championship, the draw for the tournament will have an extra eight teams hoping to avoid Germany.

Next year's tournament in France, the first to have 24 teams, will feature a new second round that includes the best four third-place finishers. That will give an added bit of optimism to the three teams that get drawn Saturday to face World Cup champion Germany in the group stage. Besides the Germans, the other top-seeded teams in Pot 1 are Spain, England, Portugal, Belgium and host France.

The new faces include Albania, Iceland, Northern Ireland and Wales in Pot 4 and Slovakia in Pot 3.

The Germans will head into the tournament trying to follow up their fourth World Cup victory with a fourth European title, albeit without retired greats such as striker Miroslav Klose and defender Philipp Lahm. In qualifying, Germany wasn't perfect, failing to beat Ireland in two matches — losing away and drawing at home — and losing to Poland for the first time ever.

Spain, the two-time defending champion which won the 2010 World Cup in between European titles, has been rebuilding since being eliminated in the first round at the last World Cup. The Spanish have won nine of their 10 qualifiers. Sadly, Euro 2016 won't just be about soccer.

There are ongoing security fears in the wake of last month's deadly attacks in Paris, and the draw will take place amid the backdrop of the turmoil surrounding UEFA President Michel Platini. Three suicide bombers blew themselves up outside Stade de France on Nov. 13, while France was playing Germany, raising the question of what the carnage would have been if they had entered the stadium. □

Durant's triple-double leads Thunder past Hawks, 107-94

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Kevin Durant had 25 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists in his seventh career triple-double as the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Atlanta Hawks 107-94 on Thursday.

Russell Westbrook had 23 points and 10 assists. It was just the second time both Durant and Westbrook had at least 10 assists in the same game, and the first time it happened in a win. Durant got his final assist on a pass to Westbrook for a 3-pointer with 1:14 remaining. Serge Ibaka had a season-high 23 points and 10 rebounds for the Thunder, who won their third straight. Kent Bazemore scored 22 points and Jeff Teague had 18 for the Hawks, who had won their previous two games. Kyle Korver added 12 and Thabo Sefolosha finished with 11. Chicago's Pau Gasol scored 24 points as the Bulls beat the Los Angeles Clippers 83-80 to end a three-game losing streak.

The Bulls caught a big break midway through

the third quarter when Clippers All-Star Blake Griffin was ejected for a hard foul against Taj Gibson, and they came away with the win after blowing a 16-point lead.

Jimmy Butler finished with 14 points after pouring in a career-high 36 the previous night against Boston. Derrick Rose scored all of his 11 points in the second half, and Gibson finished with 12 points and eight rebounds.

Griffin led the Clippers with 18 points. Chris Paul scored 12 but missed the tying 3-point attempt, while DeAndre Jordan added 10 points and 14 rebounds. The Clippers hit 10 of 22 3-pointers but came up short after winning three straight and six of seven. Brooklyn's Andrea Bargnani scored a season-high 23 points, and Thaddeus Young had 18 points and 11 rebounds as the Nets downed the Philadelphia 76ers 100-91.

Brooklyn won for the sixth time in its last seven home games. Philadelphia fell to



Oklahoma City Thunder forward Kevin Durant (35) drives around Atlanta Hawks guard Thabo Sefolosha (25) as he looks for a shot during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Oklahoma City, Thursday, Dec. 10, 2015.

(AP Photo/J Pat Carter)

0-13 on the road.

Shane Larkin scored 14 points and Bojan Bogdanovic had 10 for the Nets. Jahlil Okafor had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and T.J. McConnell scored 17 points for the 76ers.

The Sacramento Kings edged the New York Knicks 99-97 after Rajon Rondo had 16 points, 12 assists and a jaw-dropping dunk in the fourth quarter.

Rondo added nine rebounds to finish just shy of

his fifth triple-double of the season. DeMarcus Cousins had 27 points and 11 rebounds for the Kings, who have just their second winning streak of the season. Sacramento also won three in a row in November. Carmelo Anthony had 23 points and 14 rebounds but missed a potential game-winning 3-pointer at the buzzer for the Knicks, who have lost four straight and eight of the past 10 games. □

Gaudreau spoils Ristolainen's hat trick, Flames top Sabres



Calgary Flames' Johnny Gaudreau, left, celebrates his game-winning goal with teammate Sean Monahan during third period NHL hockey action against the Buffalo Sabres, in Calgary, on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2015.

(Jeff McIntosh/Canadian Press/AP)

CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — Johnny Gaudreau returned after leaving with an apparent injury to put Calgary ahead late and spoil Rasmus Ristolainen's hat trick in the Flames' 4-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday.

Gaudreau exited in the first period after a collision but returned for the second. In the third period, he worked a give-and-go with Sean

Monahan, then zipped a low shot through Chad Johnson's pads with 4:50 left for the 4-3 lead.

Monahan had two goals and an assist, and Markus Granlund also scored in Calgary's fourth straight win. Jonas Hiller stopped 27 shots.

Florida's Jaromir Jagr moved into a share of fourth on the career goals list with a first-period score

that sparked the Panthers to a 4-1 win over the Washington Capitals.

Jagr gave the Panthers the lead 51 seconds into the game. Dmitry Kulikov's long shot from the point was deflected by Jagr and bounced into the net. The goal was Jagr's first since Nov. 21 and the 731st of his career, tying him for fourth on the career list with Hall of Famer Marcel Dionne. Logan Shaw, Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Pirri also scored for the Panthers and Jonathan Huberdeau had two assists. Al Montoya had 19 saves.

Alex Ovechkin scored for Washington.

In Nashville, Tennessee, James Neal, Craig Smith and Filip Forsberg each scored in the first period as the Predators beat the Chicago Blackhawks 5-1, even though Patrick Kane extended his club-record points streak to 24 games. Kane scored his 18th goal this season at 5:43 of the

third. He'll have a chance Friday night against Winnipeg back in Chicago to match Sidney Crosby's 25-game streak, set in 2010-11, for the longest since 1992-93.

The Predators lost their challenge for goaltender interference on Kane's tally.

The Winnipeg Jets held off the Columbus Blue Jackets 6-4 after Mathieu Perrault had a goal and three assists, and Dustin Byfuglien and Drew Stafford each had a goal and two assists, while Darren Helm's second goal with 6:01 left in the third period lifted the Detroit Red Wings over the Montreal Canadiens 3-2.

In other games, Claude Giroux capped the Philadelphia Flyers' three-goal second period with his 11th of the season in a 4-2 win over the St. Louis Blues and the Tampa Bay Lightning's Nikita Kucherov had two goals in a 4-1 win over the Ottawa Senators. □

With no headgear; US Olympic boxers are struggling with cuts

GREG BEACHAM
 AP Sports Writer

RENO, Nevada (AP) — Antonio Vargas never had a cut in his boxing life until blood trickled down his forehead Wednesday during his most important bout.

The touted flyweight fought through the surprise and pain, but his Olympic dreams were imperiled when he lost a split decision at the U.S. team trials. "It happened so fast," Vargas said. "It was just a clash of heads. I had that fight, man."

Vargas didn't blame his loss on the blood, but facial cuts are a growing problem worldwide for Olympic-style boxers fighting for places in Rio de Janeiro at the first Olympics since the International Boxing Association (AIBA) decided male boxers will no longer wear protective headgear.

Seven fighters developed significant cuts during the first three days of the U.S. Olympic trials in Reno this week, including heavy-weight favorite Cam F. Awesome and Vargas, the Pan Am Games champion who might be the Americans' best chance to end their 12-year gold medal drought. They both fought on, but three other boxers were cut badly enough to force them out of the tournament. Mark Dawson was done after he needed 18 stitches in his forehead to seal a grotesque cut, also the first of his career. Even Chris Ousley's Olympic dream died because his opponent, Carlos Monroe, was cut down to the skull and couldn't continue, yet still won their bout on the scorecards.

The problems aren't confined to the U.S., with serious cuts reported from tournaments around the world since the 2013 rule change. AIBA reportedly reassessed its headgear decision during the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow when Australian boxer Daniel Lewis was cut too badly to continue, but quickly confirmed the plan



In this photo taken on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015, Derae Crane and Cam Awesome, left, compete in the U.S. Olympic Boxing Trials in Reno, Nev. Facial cuts have become a problem for many Olympic boxing hopefuls fighting toward the Rio Games, where they won't wear headgear. Cuts have sidelined several boxers at the normally bloodless U.S. team trials this week, adding fuel to the complaints of athletes and trainers who believe head guards are safer and more practical for Olympic-style competition.

(AP Photo/Cathleen Allison)

would move forward to Rio. Even AIBA's detractors realize the absence of headgear has made Olympic boxing more television-friendly. While AIBA acknowledges the danger of cuts, it claims the change was made because concussions will decrease without the heavy protective padding, although many American coaches and fighters chuckle at the science used to justify the decision.

"I don't like it, and I don't think it's necessary," said Virgil Hunter, the respected veteran trainer behind Olympic gold medalist Andre Ward's career. "Because what does it really say about the sport? You're subjecting a kid to trauma for nothing. It's one thing to get cut, and you get a million-dollar check when you get out of there. It's another thing to get cut, and you get a trophy or a handshake."

Boxers have worn headgear in every Olympics since the 1984 Los Angeles Games, and women still wear it. The proliferation of cuts is fueling complaints throughout the sport from athletes and trainers who believe head guards are the only practical way to

compete in an Olympic-style, multi-fight tournament.

WBO 140-pound champion Terence Crawford was an accomplished amateur boxer, but the unbeaten pro star wouldn't be interested in the current version of the sport.

"These kids are getting cut up and not getting paid for it, and it's potentially coming back to haunt them in their pro career," said Crawford, who traveled to Reno to support friends from Nebraska. "I've already seen four cuts in one day, and then you ask them to get stitched up and go fight tomorrow."

In a sport long dominated by tedious complaints about judging, AIBA's move from computer scoring to a traditional 10-point judging system has drawn widespread praise.

Instead, American fighters won't be surprised if cuts are the biggest story out of Rio.

Cuts usually result from two heads banging together. That's a frequent occurrence in pro boxing, but Olympic-style fighters don't have the luxury of months off to heal. They usually must fight the next day or be disqualified. □

Sunday slate puts NBA in prime time, not bed time, for Europe

BRIAN MAHONEY
 AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sundays aren't just for touchdowns and tailgates anymore.

While NFL football rules the day in the U.S., European fans are tuning in to the NBA in big numbers for a rare chance to catch live action and still get a good night of sleep.

The league expanded its schedule of Sunday afternoon starts this season, with 20 of the 23 games tipping off at 3:30 p.m. ET. That's 9:30 p.m. in Spain, home of the European champions and a devoted fan base.

Matt Brabants, NBA senior vice president of global media distribution and business operations, said the games have become "appointment viewing" for fans in the 114 countries and territories in Europe, Africa and the Middle East who will see Minnesota visit Phoenix on Sunday.

And it barely requires any scheduling difficulty for the NBA, since with about 100 international players in the league, nearly every team has somebody the overseas audience wants to watch.

"Finding a team that's compelling isn't very hard," Brabants said, "because you've got a team like, for example, the Timberwolves with a number of international players, including Ricky Rubio for example, who's obviously Spanish and a big hit in Spain that fit easily into the schedule."

It means some dreaded matinee starts for players, who often practice in the early afternoon but aren't nearly as interested in playing games then.

"I know I couldn't stand them as a player. Just hated them," said Clippers coach Doc Rivers, whose team is scheduled eight times at home this season for 12:30 p.m. local starts.

"As a coach, I think every coach loves them because at 5:30 in the evening you're done with your work for the next day — I mean, selfishly. I just felt like as a player, and it doesn't matter home or road, that you can't catch up sometimes. Like if you start off bad, it feels like by the time you wake up, the game's over."

At least the players are only tired at game time occasionally. For many international fans, it's a season-long issue.

A regular 7 or 7:30 p.m. local start in the U.S. means European fans may have to hang in until 3 a.m. or later to watch the end of a live game.

Spanish national team veteran Jose Calderon said his country's fans are so passionate about the NBA that they do it. But he knows from talking to them that they would benefit from fewer all-nighters.

"When they see you after the season, only thing they say is like, 'Man, it's tough. We can't sleep,'" the New York Knicks guard said. "Because at the end of the day, you got to wake up, or stay up. It's like 2 in the morning or 3 in the morning, depending if some days (we're) in the West or whatever, so it's tough."

"You've got to go to work the next day, so people are always like, 'I've got to sleep. It should be earlier.'" The Sunday schedule the NBA introduced last season addresses that. Fans are treated to a number of strong games, particularly in January, when the matchups scheduled are the ones being shown on ABC's national TV coverage.

Brabants said teams are supportive of the matinees, even knowing they compete with the NFL. They've been a hit overseas, where viewership for Sunday games increased 32 percent last season over 2013-14, when the games weren't being shown at a consistent time. □

After the VTech hack, some tips on keeping your kids safe

BREE FOWLER

AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Parents around the world have been understandably shaken by the hacking of a VTech database containing information on the more than 6 million children who use the company's toys.

But what's a parent to do? Internet-connected toys such as VTech's tablets, which ask parents to create personalized profiles for their children, continue to grow in popularity and are expected on many holiday gift lifts this season. Meanwhile, children have larger digital footprints than ever before, often starting at birth with an announcement on Facebook or other social media.

Here are some answers to common questions about VTech's breach and how to protect your kids' information online:

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DID HACKERS ACCESS IN THE VTECH BREACH?

The attack compromised the profiles of 6.4 million kids around the world, along with the 4.9 million parent accounts that they were connected to.

The parental accounts included names, email addresses, secret questions and answers for password retrieval, numeric Internet Protocol addresses, mailing addresses, download histories and encrypted passwords. But information in the children's accounts was restricted to names,

ages and genders, the Hong Kong-based company says.

The breach didn't expose any credit-card or other financial account information, as payments are handled by an outside company on a separate website.

Some reports suggested that photos of children and chats between kids and their parents might also have been accessed, but VTech Holdings Ltd. says it's still investigating and can't confirm that yet.

WHY IS THIS A BIG DEAL?

The worry is that even basic pieces of information could allow nefarious people to start building profiles of children, potentially setting them up for identity theft or worse down the road.

David Dewey, director of research for Pindrop Security, says kids have no credit history and their parents generally aren't checking their credit reports, making them easy targets.

"Fraud could go undetected for years, till they try to open what they think is their first credit card account," says Dewey, also a father to a pair of elementary school-aged girls.

While the worst case scenario would be for the information to be used to kidnap a child, the scenario of a "virtual kidnapping" is more likely, he says.

In that kind of situation, a person would call a parent and use the information they had about their

child to convince them that they had kidnapped the child and demand a ransom. A voice recording would make such a scam

where it's stored could be hacked.

Parents have to weigh the importance of the information they're giving up

ing childhood milestones of Facebook. Social media is often the most efficient way to share pictures and videos with friends and



A boy looks at VTech's V.Reader, an interactive e-reader for children ages 3 and older, in New York. Parents around the world have been understandably shaken by the hacking of a VTech database containing information on the more than 6 million children who use the company's toys.
(AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

much more convincing, Dewey says. Voice is something that some VTech devices collect, but it's unclear if any got stolen in the breach.

IS IT SAFE TO ENTER INFORMATION ABOUT MY KIDS INTO TOYS LIKE THESE?

Parents have become very accustomed to handing over personal information to companies in order to get a more personalized experience, whether they're setting up a kid's toy or signing up for Netflix. But there's always a chance that the database

against the benefits of having it collected.

Mark Nunnikhoven, vice president of cloud research for the IT security company Trend Micro, notes that when it comes to toys like VTech's, there's nothing stopping you from setting up your child's account with a different name, fake picture and other false information. And most of the time, you can refuse to provide it all together.

WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

It's not realistic to expect most parents to stop post-

family who live far away. But Nunnikhoven, also a father to two young kids, says it's important that parents monitor their privacy settings and make sure that what their posting is only going to friends and family. Parents also should think twice before posting pictures of events like school outings and concerts where there are other children involved.

And it's generally a good idea to stay away from Twitter, which basically broadcasts your information to the entire world, he says. □

German automakers want real-time car data for maps app

FRANK JORDANS

Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Audi, BMW and Daimler want to turn their cars into real-time sensors that will provide data to the HERE map service they recently purchased from Nokia, the German automakers said this week.

The aim is to speed up the development of more powerful maps needed for automated driving and other applications, but

also to fend off the threat from smartphone-based rivals such as Google and Apple.

"We want HERE to become the world's best reality index," said Rupert Stadler, the chief executive of Audi. "This index knows what happens where, in the very moment. It is a live representation of the world."

Data collected by cars won't be limited to traffic information. Windscreen

wiper use, for example, will also be transmitted to indicate weather conditions. In a nod to consumers' privacy concerns, all information will be anonymized. "The cars will send data about the current driving situation but not about the driver," said BMW's chief technology officer, Klaus Froehlich. It will be supplemented with data provided from smartphones, wearable devices and even traffic lights, he

added. The automakers will each hold a 1/3rd stake in the company, but the aim is to take a hands-off approach to ownership. The companies will encourage other car manufacturers to cooperate with the service by also providing data, a move that would pit the auto industry against Google and Apple, whose smartphone apps are increasingly used by drivers. HERE president Sean Fern-

back said the backing of three major automakers, who jointly paid 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) for the company, would allow it to develop a new generation of high-definition maps and fill out the white spaces in its service — notably China.

"We have a healthy financial position so we are able to afford the substantial sums required to succeed in building what we envisage," he said. □

A rout in crude oil prices hammers the stock market

BERNARD CONDON
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A slump in oil prices sparked a global sell-off in financial markets on Friday with losses spreading from Asia to Europe to the U.S., where stocks fell sharply to cap their worst week since the summer.

The selling was broad, with all 10 sectors of the Standard and Poor's 500 index ending down. Fearful investors put their money in government bonds, especially U.S. Treasuries. Another measure of fear in the markets, the so-called Vix index, jumped and is now up 70 percent in just five days. Investors worry the sharp fall in the price of oil and other commodities is a sign of weakness in the global economy, especially China, and that that will cut into profits at big energy companies and suppliers of raw materials as well as other companies.

"We're stockpiling commodities and demand is not picking up," said Tim Courtney, chief investment officer of Exencial Wealth Advisors. "It's kind of a depressing market."

Energy shares, already decimated this year, fell 3.4 percent on Friday. Southwestern Energy plunged 14 percent. Freeport McMoRan, a mining giant, dropped 6 percent.

The trouble began with a report from the International Energy Agency that said the oversupply in oil would persist until late next year

even as demand continues to weaken. Benchmark U.S. crude plunged \$1.14, or 3 percent, to

cent and France's CAC 40 shed 1.8 percent. Investors were also rattled by trouble in a risky cor-

indicate that the U.S. economy is healthy enough to withstand a rate hike, but investors are still nervous



Specialist Meric Greenbaum works at his post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. Stocks closed sharply lower Friday, led by more declines in energy and materials stocks as prices for oil and other commodities slide.
 (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

close at \$35.62 a barrel in New York. It has been falling for 1 1/2 years and is now at its lowest level since early 2009.

By the end of the day, the Standard & Poor's 500 index lost 39.86 points, or 1.9 percent, to 2,012.37. It was down 3.8 percent for the week, its worst showing since August.

The Dow Jones industrial average lost 309.54 points, or 1.8 percent, to 17,265.21. The Nasdaq composite declined 111.71 points, or 2.2 percent, to 4,933.47.

In Europe, Germany's DAX lost 2.4 percent, Britain's FTSE 100 dropped 2.2 per-

ner of the credit markets where bonds from heavily indebted companies are traded. Their prices have fallen sharply as investors fear the companies that issued the bonds might default. A fund that tracks the bonds, the iShares iBoxx USD High Yield Corporate Bond ETF, dropped nearly 4 percent in five days.

Investors were also focused on a Federal Reserve meeting next week where the central bank is widely expected to announce an increase in its benchmark interest rate from a record low.

Recent economic reports

because it would be the first rate rise in nearly a decade. "It's anticipation of the Fed, it's oil, it's credit ... all of these factors are putting fear and confusion into the investor," said Jonathan D. Corpina, senior managing partner at Meridian Equity Partners. In a sign of trouble among commodity producers, Dow Chemical and DuPont on Friday announced a \$130 billion deal to merge their businesses to counter falling prices. Their stocks had risen in previous days on reports the deal was forthcoming, but fell sharply on Friday.

PepsiCo, Muller to close upstate NY yogurt plant

MARY ESCH
Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — PepsiCo Inc. and German dairy giant Theo Muller Group ended production Thursday at a western New York yogurt plant that opened with much fanfare and state money in 2013, saying it didn't meet expectations in a competitive and dynamic marketplace. National milk marketing cooperative Dairy Farmers of America has agreed to purchase the Muller Quaker Dairy in Batavia, co-op spokeswoman Monica Massey said Thursday. She said the cooperative is exploring several milk handling and manufacturing options for the plant.

The PepsiCo spokesman said about 64 of the plant's 170 jobs are expected to be cut and transition assistance will be offered. He said the others are expected to be retained by the dairy cooperative.

The \$208 million yogurt plant was opened in the spring of 2013 with about \$14 million in state tax credits as a key player in the yogurt boom touted by Gov. Andrew Cuomo at the state's first "yogurt summit" in 2012.

New York has been the top U.S. yogurt producer for several years because of the booming Greek yogurt sector. Top players in the state are Chobani, Fage, and until Thursday, Muller.

"We are immensely appreciative of the support we've received over the years from the community, our customers and the consumers who purchased our products," PepsiCo said in a statement. "We are also pleased to know that DFA, the nation's leading milk marketing cooperative, with nearly 1,400 member farms in New York alone, intends to continue to invest in the community and further expand their production and agricultural presence in the state." Muller yogurt has been a popular brand in Europe for more than a century.

UN:

World economy stumbled in 2015, with 2.4% growth

EDITH M. LEDERER
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The world economy stumbled in 2015, with growth estimated at just 2.4 percent this year following a nearly 60 percent drop in oil prices and an over 20 percent fall in commodity prices in the last 18 months, according to a U.N. report released this week.

The report on the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2016 said many

developing and former Soviet bloc countries suffered a broad slowdown to the weakest pace since the global financial crisis in 2008. The growth rate compares to 2.6 percent in 2014.

"Weak global growth continues to hurt labor markets," U.N. Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development Lenni Montiel said at a news conference. "Unemployment is on the rise in

some regions, or remains stubbornly high in some countries. At the same time, job insecurity is becoming more entrenched amid the shift from salaried work to self-employment."

One of the striking features is a sharp decline in investment across a large set of countries, said Hamid Rashid, chief of the Global Economic Monitoring Unit at the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Af-

fairs. All but five of the 20 largest developing countries observed a decline in investment over the last 18 months, he said.

There was one positive statistic with implications for efforts to combat climate change: There was no growth in energy-related carbon emissions in 2014. It was only the second time that has happened in the past 20 years. The first was in 2009 when the global economy contracted.

Volkswagen group sales 2.2 percent lower in November

BERLIN (AP) — Volkswagen said Friday that its global sales were 2.2 percent lower in November than a year earlier, with increases in western European and Chinese deliveries helping cushion the impact of steep drops in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The German automaker, whose brands include Audi, Porsche and Seat as well as the core Volkswagen marque, has been hit

by fallout from the diesel emissions-cheating scandal that erupted in mid-September in the U.S. and then spread worldwide.

The company said it delivered 833,700 vehicles worldwide last month, down from 852,900 in November 2014.

While U.S. sales were off 15.3 percent at 45,300 units, and there were steeper drops in Brazil and Russia amid unrelated economic

troubles, deliveries in western Europe were up 2.6 percent at 270,400 and sales in China rose 5.5 percent to 329,000.

Unlike in the U.S., there has been no confirmation Volkswagen cheated on European emissions tests.

It will nevertheless recall some 8.5 million cars across the region to fix their emissions systems.

For the year's first 11 months, group deliveries

fell 1.7 percent to nearly 9.1 million from the previous year's 9.26 million.

The company didn't give a breakdown for sales of vehicles with diesel and gasoline engines.

CEO Matthias Mueller acknowledged that "the Volkswagen Group and its brands are currently experiencing challenging times."

"At the same time, we are pleased that our customers are remaining loyal to

us, especially in this situation, and continue to place their trust in us," he said in a statement.

The core Volkswagen Passenger Cars brand saw deliveries drop 2.4 percent to 496,100 vehicles in November, while January-November sales were down 4.5 percent to some 5.34 million. The brand delivered 6.12 million cars in total last year. □

DuPont, Dow Chemical seek merger, then 3-way split



A Dow Chemical plant is seen in La Porte, Texas. Dow Chemical and the DuPont will attempt to merge in an all-stock deal that would create a colossal chemical producer worth \$130 billion, before splitting into three separate companies. The deal announced Friday, Dec. 11, 2015 is being billed a merger of equals, to be called DowDuPont.

(AP Photo/Pat Sullivan)

RANDALL CHASE
AP Business Writer

DOVER, Del. (AP) — Dow Chemical and DuPont are merging to form a company valued at about \$130

billion as they try to counter falling commodities prices and weakness in some key markets that have pressured their giant agriculture and chemicals businesses.

The two companies, whose research has brought the world products ranging from Ziploc bags and Saran wrap developed by Dow to DuPont's Teflon coat-

ings and Nylon and Kevlar fibers, will first form DowDuPont, then separate into three independent publicly traded companies focused on agriculture, material science and specialty products.

The proposed merger, announced Friday, would temporarily create the world's second-largest chemical company, behind BASF. It comes as both Dow and DuPont Co. have seen recent declines in agricultural performance and been pressured by activist shareholders to control spending and shift away from commodities to faster-growing parts of their businesses.

"Overall, this transaction represents a tectonic shift in an industry that has been evolving over the last many years," said Dow chairman and CEO Andrew Liveris, calling the merger a seminal event for employees and customers of the two companies, which have a combined workforce of

more than 110,000 people. DuPont chairman and CEO Edward Breen said the "industrial logic" behind the deal was compelling.

"When I look at DuPont and Dow, I see businesses that fit together like hand and glove," Breen said.

DuPont shares fell 5.4 percent to \$70.56 in midday trading. Dow Chemical shares were down 3 percent at \$53.27.

Breen took over as DuPont CEO following the abrupt resignation in October of Ellen Kullman, who just a few months earlier fended off a proxy challenge by Trian Fund Management, a hedge fund led by activist investor Nelson Peltz. Peltz has called for DuPont's agriculture, nutrition and health and industrial biosciences units to be combined into a single growth company, separate from the more cyclical businesses of performance materials, safety and protection, and electronics and communication. □

Yum CEO Creed says brands need to be more like Uber

CANDICE CHOI
AP Food Industry Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Yum CEO Greg Creed thinks he figured out why sales at Pizza Hut have gone cold: The chain needs to be more like the car-hailing service Uber.

"If you think about the Uber experience, it's easy to use, it's easy to pay, it's very easy to track," Creed said in a phone interview from Dallas late Thursday after Yum Brands' investor day.

During a presentation, Creed said there was a time when the way to beat the competition was to have a better product. He now believes that convenience trumps quality.

Creed said the insight that "easy" beats "better" will help Yum energize its three fast-food chains, which also include KFC and Taco Bell. That means everything from shaving time off drive-through waits to pushing into areas like catering, de-

livery and mobile ordering. With Pizza Hut in particular, Creed said the chain hasn't paid as much attention to making life easier for customers as it focused on being "better." Yum notes the chain's sales have flagged even as Pizza Hut is often cited as a favorite among consumers. It turns out people who prefer the chain's pizzas are only willing to wait about two minutes more for it, Creed said. Yet Pizza Hut takes more

than two minutes longer to deliver than its competitors. It's one of the reasons Yum thinks Pizza Hut has flagged in the U.S. as rivals have prospered. In recent years, Domino's has credited the convenience of its online ordering and mobile app for fueling its steady growth. Last year, its sales rose 7.5 percent at established U.S. locations, following growth of 5.4 percent the previous year. In the meantime, Pizza Hut's sales fell 3 percent

at established locations last year, following a 2 percent drop in 2013.

To get the chain back on track, Creed said he made Pizza Hut's management team get in a room about a month ago to come up with a "clear brand identity." They were told not to come out until they did.

"One of the joys of being the boss, you can lock other people away," said Creed, who stepped into the CEO role this year. □

Mutts



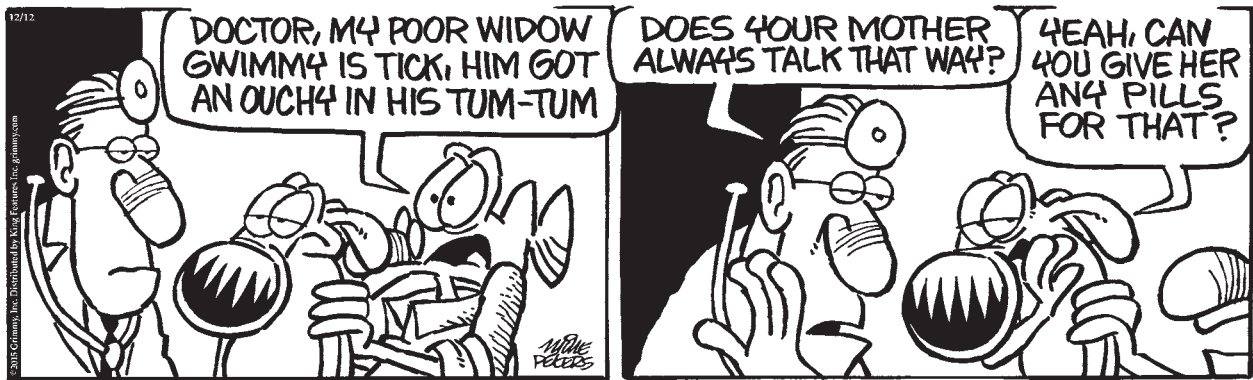
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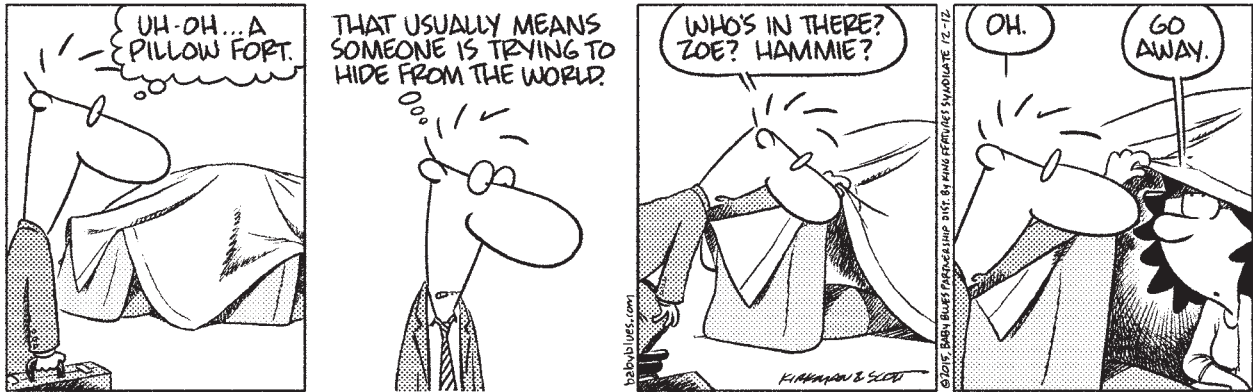
Blondie



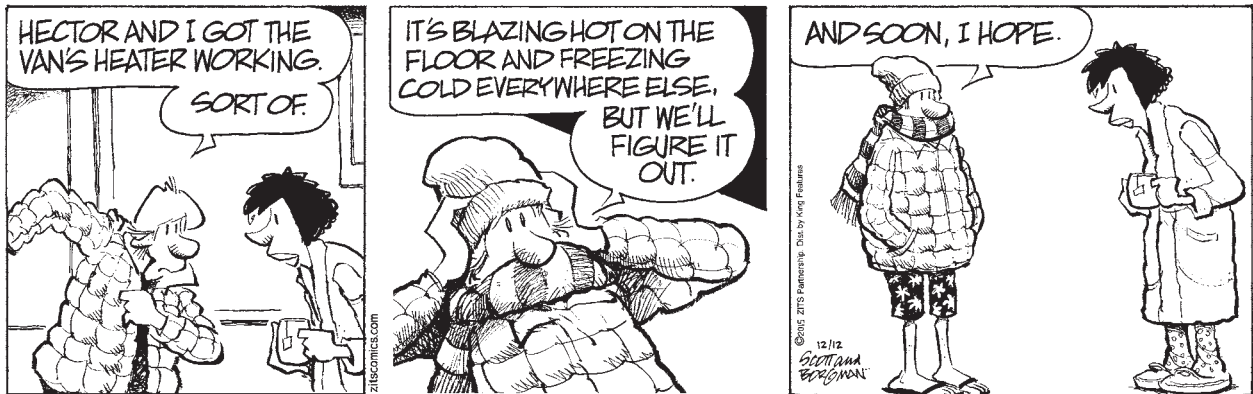
Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

8				9	7			6
2					1			7
	6						5	
5	9							
4				1				2
							7	3
	7						6	
1			5					4
3			4	2				1

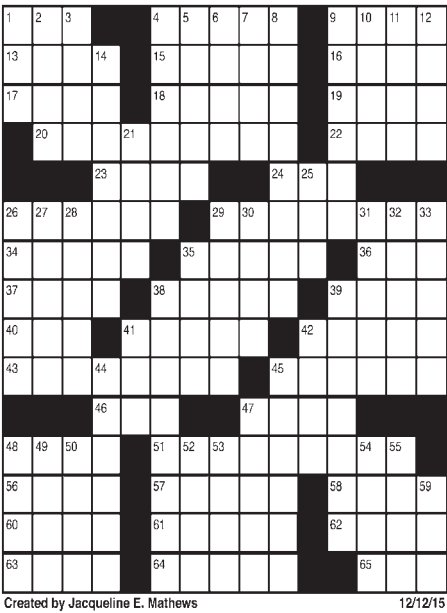
Difficulty Level ★★★★★ 12/12

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

3	7	4	1	5	2	8	6	9
2	9	6	7	4	8	1	3	5
5	8	1	3	9	6	2	4	7
1	2	5	9	8	4	6	7	3
6	3	8	5	1	7	9	2	4
9	4	7	2	6	3	5	1	8
7	6	9	4	2	5	3	8	1
4	5	2	8	3	1	7	9	6
8	1	3	6	7	9	4	5	2

- ACROSS
- 1 ___ favor for; help out
- 4 Subsided
- 9 "Nonsense!"
- 13 "Love Like ___"; Barbra Streisand song
- 15 Depart
- 16 Bump ___; meet unexpectedly
- 17 Engrave
- 18 Mountains of South America
- 19 Messy fellow
- 20 Good knife's quality
- 22 Clerical error
- 23 "Ring-around-the-___, a pocket full of..."
- 24 Hearing organ
- 26 ___ down; topsy-turvy
- 29 Small fruit pie
- 34 Harness straps
- 35 Delicious
- 36 "___ you kidding me?"
- 37 TV's "The Big ___ Theory"
- 38 Lassos
- 39 Strong ___ ox
- 40 Highest club
- 41 Polk or Carter
- 42 Toothpaste brand
- 43 Recent arrival
- 45 Is impudent
- 46 Agent: abbr.
- 47 Weathercock
- 48 Havana's land
- 51 Car crashes
- 56 "...giving ___ up the chimney he rose..."
- 57 Reigned
- 58 Fine ___; music, painting, etc.
- 60 European lang.
- 61 Fish with a net
- 62 Dishonest one
- 63 Facial center
- 64 Perceive; feel
- 65 Mme. or Sra.
- DOWN
- 1 Female deer



Friday's Puzzle Solved

LOBO	AGNES	ASHE
IHOP	LOOSE	THUG
DIRT	CONSENTING	
SOD	POSE	OINKS
EMOTE	DOC	
PARENT	KISSES	
ALLAY	RANGE	MID
TOIL	POPES	SPRY
SON	ELATE	MELEE
FEELER	SALONS	
DOA	DALLY	
STRIP	HUGE	ANT
NAUSEATING	OBEY	
ALSO	PONCE	FLAK
GLEN	ENDED	FETE

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- 38 "...O'er the we watched..."
- 39 Stockpile of weapons
- 41 Actor Pesci
- 42 Walking stick
- 44 Baby's bed
- 45 Cowboy's seat
- 47 Opinions
- 48 Abel's brother
- 49 "Do ___ others..."
- 50 Deadly snakes
- 52 Make well
- 53 Family group
- 54 Fit; shapely
- 55 Night twinkler
- 59 Last years jrs.

NYC's SantaCon aims to put an end to naughty-or-nice debate

JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Could this be the year of SantaCon without SantaControversy?

After several years of defending the massive, costumed Christmastime bar hop against a bad-Santa rap, organizers are making new efforts to convey that the SantaCon coming to town Saturday is growing — not throwing — up.

For the first time, they publicly released the planned route days before their romp through Brooklyn and downtown Manhattan bars. Organizers, who once shied from officialdom, started planning with police over a month ago, got a permit to assemble in a park and even agreed to tweet police messages about pedestrian safety.

Performance art to some, pub crawl to others, SantaCon is trying to evolve as organizers face pressure to take more responsibility for revelry. It has ballooned in size to thousands of people and now is coming at a time of heightened concern about security and public gatherings.

"There's a transition to a more positive SantaCon," said Norman Siegel, a civil rights lawyer who has worked with the group since last year.

Still, mixed feelings are as evident as dueling pro- and anti-Santacon signs

in windows of businesses in Manhattan's East Village, and some officials are seeing red.

A dozen state and city politicians this week pressed SantaCon to "self-police" participants and asked the State Liquor Authority to station investigators along the route.

"Try spending an afternoon in some of our neighborhoods where the event is occurring, and you'll find incidents of disruptive and boorish behavior," says state Sen. Brad Hoylman, who represents Manhattan areas on the route. He said he was glad to see such changes as the route disclosure, but he's still concerned the format encourages binge drinking. The agency and SantaCon said they already planned to do what was asked.

SantaCon grew from a 1994 San Francisco "Santarchy" that satirized Christmas consumerism into bashes in over 300 cities. New York's is generally acknowledged as the biggest.

Enthusiasts paint SantaCon as a creative take on holiday traditions of festive dress, good cheer and charity. Organizers say they raise tens of thousands of dollars for various causes.

But some New Yorkers came to see SantaCon as the fright before Christmas. □

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Oceanfront \$14,500
3 BEDRM OV \$17K

Marriott Aruba Ocean club

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Estonian turtle-robot searches for shipwrecks and treasure



Taavi Salumae, designer of the U-CAT robot and researcher at the Biorobotics Centre at the Tallinn University of Technology, tests the U-CAT robot in an aquarium using a fish net in Tallinn, Estonia. The unique feature of the U-CAT, about the size of a vacuum cleaner, is four silicon flippers inspired by streamlined sea turtles' arms and legs.

(AP Photo/Vitnija Saldava)

JARI TANNER
Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — The Baltic seabed, littered with war debris and shipwrecks, has fascinated historians and researchers through the ages. But the underwater search robots they use pose problems by further disturbing the silty waters with their propeller movements.

Estonian engineers say they

may have found a solution with their latest invention — a small, propeller-less underwater robot that causes minimum disturbance and lowers the risk of damage to submarine archaeology. The unique feature of the U-CAT, about the size of a vacuum cleaner, is four silicon flippers inspired by streamlined sea turtles' arms and legs.

"They move in a slow and

quiet motion and won't bring up sediment from the (sea) bottom," says Taavi Salumae, a designer at the Biorobotics Center of Tallinn University of Technology. The underwater probe has been developed since 2012 in the EU-funded Arrows project that focuses on new technologies for marine research. It can stay submerged for four hours at a depth of 100 meters (330

feet) on a single battery charge of two hours. It's equipped with a camera and lights.

Most importantly, it can easily be rotated in tight spots that are too dangerous or difficult for human divers.

Salumae says the U-CAT, an acronym for Underwater Curious Archaeology Turtle (winner of a Facebook contest to name the robot), is one of the first robots designed to go inside shipwrecks and help underwater archaeologists study interiors of locations. But its small size has a few drawbacks: It is limited to shallow waters, unlike large robots, some of which can reach depths of six kilometers (20,000 feet) without damage from water pressure. And it is not remotely controlled like traditional wired probes, which means there's also a risk of losing it during missions.

Last summer, it was successfully tested in the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean by a group of European researchers.

Priit Latti, a marine archaeologist from the Estonian Maritime Museum, watched the probe dive to a flooded Soviet-era pris-

on in July off the Estonian coast, and was impressed. "The fact the robot uses flippers for movement is a huge advantage," he said. "It can move in every direction."

Latti says the museum is considering it for future undersea investigations, possibly to study the remains of a 17th-century vessel recently found in Estonian waters.

Bordered by Finland, Sweden, Russia, the Baltic nations, Poland, Germany and Denmark, the Baltic Sea is rich in historical wooden wrecks dating back to the 15th and 16th centuries, well-preserved because of the sea's low salinity and cool water that help keep marine shipworms away.

Divers regularly make discoveries, including an 18th-century shipwreck filled with drinkable vintage champagne near the Finnish Aland Islands, and a few months ago Finnish divers located a German submarine, the U-679, which sank in the Gulf of Finland in 1945.

"A diver can stay submerged and film only for a limited time," said Immi Wallin, head of the Finnish diver group which located the U-679. "This kind of robot can fit into very tight places and enter into a ship's cargo hold through a narrow door."

The U-CAT prototype isn't commercially available yet, but Salumae said the response has been positive.

He claims it's some "three to four times" cheaper than the "large and expensive" mostly propeller-powered robots, which are used by the military and the oil and gas industry and run into tens of thousands of dollars. □

NASA:

3 space station astronauts safely return to Earth

MOSCOW (AP) — A three-person crew from the International Space Station landed safely Friday in the snowy steppes of Kazakhstan. The U.S. space agency's Kjell Lindgren, Russia's Oleg Kononenko and Kimiya Yui of Japan returned to Earth in their Soyuz TMA-17M capsule after 141 days in space. They touched down on schedule at 7:12 p.m. local time (1312 GMT)

about 120 kilometers (75 kilometers) northeast of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan. Kononenko reported to the Russian Mission Control that the crew was feeling fine as the capsule was descending by parachute in thick clouds before landing softly in darkness on the wind-swept steppes. Russian rescue teams in four helicopters arrived quickly at the landing site to help

the crew get out of the capsule, which rested on its side in the snow. Because of the cold temperatures and strong winds, the crew was quickly flown to Dzhezkazgan after a brief inspection by doctors. In better weather, the crew undergoes a post-flight medical check-up in a tent at the landing site. Expedition 46 Commander Scott Kelly of NASA and

crewmates Mikhail Kornienko and Sergey Volkov of Russia remain on the station. They will be joined by three new crew members next Tuesday: NASA's Tim Kopra, Russia's Yuri Malenchenko and the European Space Agency's Tim Peake. Kelly and Kornienko are on the first joint U.S.-Russian one-year mission at the space station. □

Musical 'Elf' returns to New York led by Eric Petersen

MARK KENNEDY

AP Drama Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Christmas musical based on Will Ferrell's movie "Elf" has returned to New York for the holidays, led by a stage and TV veteran whose oldest child's first Broadway show was — that's right — "Elf."

Eric Petersen's 5-year-old daughter, Sophia, caught the show a few winters ago and adored it. Years later, she sat mesmerized for several hours watching her dad at a rehearsal of the show.

"My daughter loves theater so much and so she's been going to shows well before most kids go," Petersen said. "I'm in trouble. She's totally a show kid. It's very apparent."

Petersen plays Buddy in the touring musical that plays The Theater at Madison Square Garden until Dec. 27. He's joined by a cast that includes J.B. Adams

as Santa and Veronica J. Kuehn as Buddy's love interest.

"I really love playing the character," said Petersen. "I feel like I get to do so much fun stuff — physical comedy, which is my bag, and I get to do a little bit of a love story. It's the whole package."

The musical opens in the North Pole, where Buddy learns he's not an elf but a human. It then charts his journey in search of his father in Manhattan, perking up everyone he meets.

Petersen looks nothing like Ferrell but director Sam Scalamoni said that was never a goal. "It has to be somebody who understands the comedy and the heart of the piece," he said. "Funny is great, but if there's not heart, then I don't care. Eric is such a balance of both."

The musical's story, adapted by Tony Award winners Thomas Meehan ("The Pro-



This image released by Madison Square Garden Company shows a performance of "Elf The Musical," playing at The Theater at Madison Square Garden in New York until Dec. 27.

(Amy Boyle/Madison Square Garden Company via AP)

ducers," "Hairspray") and Bob Martin ("The Drowsy Chaperone"), preserves many of the familiar punch lines from Ferrell's hilarious 2003 film. Yet with its big, catchy numbers, it doesn't have the feel of a show that was plucked from the screen and retrofitted for the stage.

Now-classic lines from the movie are intact, such as

Buddy's PG-rated swear "cotton-headed ninny-muggins" and when he confronts a department store Santa by hissing, "You smell like beef and cheese." A new opening number — "Happy All the Time" — has jumped from the last Broadway version to the tour.

Petersen, who lives in Los Angeles, has carved a ca-

reer in both TV and stage, earning credits on the TV-Land sitcom "Kirstie" and "The Brittany Murphy Story." He was on Broadway in "Peter & The Starcatcher" and "Shrek: The Musical."

It was while starring as Shrek in the first national tour that Sophia arrived and joined him and his wife, Lisa, on the road. Petersen and his daughter soon shared a special routine: She would poke daddy on the nose and he would reciprocate. Sophia grew comfortable having Shrek around but Petersen didn't know for a time if his little girl really knew daddy was inside all that makeup. One day while he was in full Shrek get-up, she poked him on the nose. "I was like, 'OK, you know that it's daddy under all of this stuff.'"

This time on the road, there's less makeup to play Buddy, and Sophia has a baby brother, 10-month-old Miles. □

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Owner Benjamin Petrocchi

Review: Ron Howard's 'In the Heart of the Sea' treads water

LINDSEY BAHR
AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ron Howard's "In the Heart of the Sea" is a curious beast. The ambitions are as big as a whale; the results are an earnest wreck. It could possibly work if you think of the movie as a metaphor for the story it's trying to tell, but that's a little too meta for something that should be fairly straightforward. It's ostensibly about the

real expedition that inspired Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick" that Nathaniel Philbrick wrote about in his nonfiction book. But despite a promising start, something is lost in the spectacle and the framing device, which ultimately undermines its own story. Howard uses Melville as a character (played by Ben Whishaw) and his curiosity about the mysterious circumstances of how



This photo shows Cillian Murphy, left, as Matthew Joy and Chris Hemsworth as Owen Chase in Warner Bros. Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' action adventure film, "In the Heart of the Sea." (Warner Bros. Pictures via AP)


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the whaleship Essex sank as the audience's entry into the story. He's looking for big answers about the unknown. So, he finds Tom Nickerson (Brendan Gleeson), the ship's only remaining survivor, who's drinking his life away. At his wife's pleading, and Melville's promise of generous payment for one night's conversation, Tom starts to spill about the events of 30 years ago, when he was 14 (played by Tom Holland). It's best not to do the math. This is the story of two men, he says: A Captain, George Pollard (Benjamin Walker), and his first mate, Owen Chase (Chris Hemsworth). Pollard is the son of the expedition's proprietor. He's wealthy, arrogant, entitled and inexperienced. Chase is the real seaman — a working-class Adonis with a classist chip on his broad shoulders. He's also arrogant, but has the skills to back it up. Chase flexes his hero mus-

cles early, bounding up a ladder to cut free a tangled sail, and the Captain responds with ill-advised bravado in leading the men full-speed into a squall. But the "who leads" question is abandoned quickly and without much resolution once the whaling starts. Perhaps the most striking scenes are those that deal with the process of catching a whale, from spearing to the gory disemboweling. But whales are scarce on the ship's normal route and they must sail on to get enough oil for their bosses. It's thousands of miles off the coast of South America where they encounter the big one, which locks on the Essex with a Terminator's resolve. Hemsworth is best when he's by himself — either barking orders or doing something physical. Of all the actors he shares scenes with, it's Cillian Murphy as his second mate who brings out something resembling

emotion. But we never really care about the lead, so there's little hope that we'll be interested in the rest of the men once it becomes solely about survival. Indeed, most of the second half is spent drifting with them on lifeboats. In these interminable minutes, we don't get anything resembling an understanding of how they survived (or didn't) either mentally or physically. Future Tom Nickerson isn't much help either, and Melville is already too focused on his own literary ambitions to actually ask the big questions he told us he was seeking. "In the Heart of the Sea" tries to be about so many things — ambition, capitalism, greed and survival. In the end, it feels most interested in how Herman Melville got his classic. The pieces are there, but apparently it's up to "Moby-Dick" to assemble them, not Ron Howard.

Veteran 'Today' weatherman Willard Scott retiring

NEW YORK (AP) — With Willard Scott announcing his retirement, centenarians will have to look elsewhere for a salute.

The longtime television weatherman, a fixture on NBC's "Today" show for 35 years, said Friday that he's hanging it up. The morning show plans a tribute to his work on Tuesday. The genial 81-year-old

Scott delivered weather forecasts until Al Roker took over that role. In recent years, he's appeared once or twice a week to mark the birthdays of viewers who had reached 100 years old or beyond. He began working at NBC as a 16-year-old page in the network's Washington bureau. The show's anchors on Friday took note of a memorable Scott moment. He

was stationed on the street during President George H.W. Bush's inaugural parade in 1989, when the new first lady, Barbara Bush, peeled away from the route to give him a kiss. "America's first family chose to single out America's weatherman and I remember smiling from ear to ear at that moment for Willard," said "Today" anchor Matt Lauer.

Harrison Ford promises older, wiser Solo in 'Force Awakens'

DERRIK J. LANG

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When speaking about "Star Wars," there are few topics that inspire a twinkle in Harrison Ford's eyes.

The 73-year-old actor is matter-of-fact about almost everything involving the sci-fi series' latest episode — from his reunion with Carrie Fisher ("It was no big deal.") to the franchise's unwavering popularity ("For me, it's old news.").

However, when Ford brings up his new co-stars, he lights up like the Millennium Falcon charging through hyperspace.

"The new, young actors Daisy Ridley and John Boyega were well cast, well directed and are huge talents," he said, his gritty voice lifting, during a recent interview. "They come off really well in the movie. They carry the movie."

After more than 30 years, Ford is reprising his role as smart-aleck smuggler Han Solo in director J.J. Abrams' "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," out Dec. 18.

The iconic character, who hasn't been seen on screen since celebrating the fall of the Galactic Empire in 1983's "Return of the Jedi," serves as an unlikely mentor to scavenger Rey (Daisy Ridley), defector Finn (John Boyega) and pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) as they team up to take on masked adversary Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) and his minions.

While the film has been cloaked in an unparalleled level of secrecy, Ford guaranteed that fans can expect the same Solo they fell in love with from the original "Star Wars" trilogy. (Disney declined to screen "Force Awakens" for this story ahead of the Dec. 14 premiere).

"The shorthand is that he's older and wiser, but his bones are the same," Ford said. "He's not selling real estate now. He's the same guy — only with the passage of 30 years. While we do not sit down and describe what he's been



This photo shows Peter Mayhew as Chewbacca and Harrison Ford as Han Solo in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," directed by J.J. Abrams. Lawrence Kasdan co-wrote the screenplay with Abrams. The movie opens in U.S. theaters on Dec. 18, 2015.

(Film Frame/Lucasfilm via AP)

doing for those years, we do discover in the context of the story what the complications have been in his life."

Ford, who infamously wanted George Lucas to kill off Solo in "Return of the Jedi," had a "why not?" attitude about suiting back up as Solo. He wasn't surprised by Disney's Death Star-sized plan to revive the franchise after acquiring Lucasfilm in 2012 for more than \$4 billion. The studio is planning to release a stand-alone film about a young Solo in 2018.

"If you make a huge investment in a product and it

pays off, there's wisdom in seeing whether the well has run dry," Ford said. "If the well has run dry, (expletive) admit it and go on to something else. This well has not dried, especially when you introduce new discoveries, which Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac and Adam Driver represent."

Despite embodying the intergalactic scoundrel in three films, the "Indiana Jones" star didn't feel the need to provide "Force Awakens" filmmakers with much insight into Solo, who is back alongside shaggy sidekick Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew).

"They wanted to know if I didn't like something, and we would talk about ways to fix it," Ford said. "That's what we do. It's a collaborative process. There wasn't much. (Lawrence) Kasdan was back. He was one of the writers from the original films. He has a keen understanding on how the beast works, so I think they produced a script that — in my mind — was very easy to work with."

Once he was back in a galaxy far, far away, Ford's reprisal was stopped short on the second day of production last year when a door on the Millennium

Falcon set outside London fell on him. He broke his left leg and was grounded for months. The unexpected time off proved more frustrating than fruitful.

"I had been ready," he said. "I didn't have much to think about. I think it gave J.J. some more time to think about some of the scenes." After his work on the postponed production eventually wrapped up, Ford endured another mishap involving a flying machine. The aeronautical aficionado suffered several injuries when his vintage plane's engine failed and crashed in Santa Monica, Calif. □

Isaac discusses Poe's inspiration, inner song in 'Star Wars'

SANDY COHEN

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Spoiler alert: Oscar Isaac's X-wing pilot Poe Dameron does not break into song in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." Isaac won awards the last time he sang onscreen, in the 2013 Coen Brothers' film "Inside Llewyn Davis," and he charmed the Twitterverse with his vocals last week when he sang a duet of "Baby, It's Cold Outside" with his "Star Wars" co-star Daisy Ridley.

But Poe keeps his music on the inside.

"Poe? He's got inner song happening all the time," Isaac said in a recent interview.

Though Isaac didn't add music to Poe's repertoire,

he did come up with a backstory for the character that's now part of "Star Wars" lore.

In the original 1977 film, the fictional planet Yavin was actually Guatemala's ancient Mayan city of Tikal. Isaac was born in Guatemala, so he decided that Poe must be from Yavin.

"Sure enough, LucasFilm heard that, and when it came time to do 'Shattered Empire,' the comic book, that was part of the story," Isaac said. "So other than being a part of this cultural phenomenon, what's even wilder is to be contributing to it."

The actor also worked with director J.J. Abrams to develop Poe's character in "The Force Awakens," but

in keeping with the hyper-secrecy shrouding the film, Isaac won't offer any specifics.

"It's like having a gift that you're going to give to somebody and they're going to open it very soon," he said. "But that's why it's also been fun keeping it secret. Because when you buy a gift, you don't want to tell them what it is before they open it."

What Isaac will reveal, though, is that he prepared for the role by reading real-life accounts of WWII fighter pilots, who he describes as "the closest thing to superheroes that we have."

"They soar above all the rest of us at incredible speeds and they have to have so many things clear in their

minds," he said. "There's so many things happening. So the fact that they can do this and survive and excel gives them a sense of invincibility, a sense of immortality. And some swagger."

Isaac may need some of that swagger himself when his roles in "Star Wars" and "X-Men: Apocalypse" make him a big-screen hero. He said he's "not looking forward" to the possibility of big fame, but he is enjoying seeing his image as an action figure.

"I think even more trippy is the Go-Gurt with my face on it. You can drink yogurt out of my head," he said. "I haven't done it yet. I'm not sure I'll be able to do it. It might be too meta for me." □

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